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ELISE P. GARRISON

GROANING TEARS

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ETHICAL AND DRAMATIC ASPECTS OF SUICIDE IN GREEK TRAGEDY

BY

ELISE P. GARRISON

E.J. BRILL
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For Mom, Sara L. and Sara J.

CONTENTS

Preface ix
I. Introduction 1
Pōs zēn chrēn: the ethical life 4
Attitudes toward suicide in ancient Greece 11
Appendix A: the sociology of suicide 34
II. To endure or to die honorably 45
Ajax 46
Women of Trachis 53
Hippolytus 65
Heracles 71
III. The suicide note: escape songs 80
Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens* 81
Women of Trachis 87
Hippolytus 89
Andromache 93
Hecuba 99
IV. "Groaning tears": suicide from grief 102
Oedipus the King 103
Antigone 113
Euripides' *Suppliant Women* 121
Phoenician Women 126
V. Noble suicide 129
Antigone 132
Phoenician Women 138
Children of Heracles 144
Iphigenia in Aulis 149
Hecuba 157
Alcestis 161
VI. Conclusion: suicide in Euripides' *Helen* 168
Incidental suicide 176
Appendix B: plot summaries 180
Select bibliography 186
Index locorum 201
General index 207

PREFACE

I suppose anyone embarking upon a study of Greek tragedy and ethics must begin with apologies. The attempt to contribute to our understanding of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides requires a certain boldness mixed with extreme humility in the face of centuries of previous scholarship. In a field so thoroughly probed, it would be impossible to cover every aspect with the same style, grace and depth of those who have gone before, and I apologize in advance for any omissions or superficialities in my treatment or bibliography. The specific topic, suicide, has received surprisingly little attention in studies of Greek tragedy, and so a place for a study of this pervasive and vital topic clearly exists. This book is my modest attempt to expand and enrich not only our knowledge of fifth-century tragedy, but also fifth-century ethics and thought in general.

When dealing with Greek tragedy, one must always remember that first and foremost plays are performed events, appealing because of their initial impact on an audience. Yet, as Aristophanes, Plato and Aristotle insist, the tragedians also played the role of moral educators of society, not as preachers but as explorers and questioners of values that puzzled them as much as their audiences. The deeper meaning, then, of the texts deserves our attention, and the social and ethical considerations of suicidal characters have proven of immense utility in uncovering aspects of that complex texture exemplified by suicide victims and embedded in the dramas. Throughout this book I have staunchly resisted excerpting the suicides from the context of their plays. To some readers it may seem, then, that suicide is the excuse for the more general discussions. Yet the social and ethical environments of the plays, I argue, cause victims to destroy themselves; therefore, the whole play is of the utmost importance.

I hope the result will be valuable not only to classicists but also to scholars and students in other disciplines when interdisciplinary studies are becoming more crucial to higher education. To this end I have translated all Greek quotations and transliterated all Greek words in the text. In transliterating I indicate omega and eta with a macron (ō and ē). In transliterating Greek names I have used the most familiar versions. All translations are mine, except where noted, and

are literal rather than poetic. Technical textual problems, where relevant, receive summary discussion in the notes. For the Greek texts of the tragedians I have used for Aeschylus the Oxford Classical Text of D. Page; for Sophocles the Teubner texts (2 volumes) of R.D. Dawe; and for Euripides the Oxford Classical Texts for volumes 1 and 2 of J. Diggle and for volume 3 of G. Murray. Any deviations from these texts are referred to in the notes.

This book is a distant, scarcely recognizable, descendant of my dissertation (Stanford 1987), and I have continued to rely on my friend and adviser, Marsh McCall. I remain grateful to other current and former members of the Classics Department at Stanford for their continuing support, congeniality, open-mindedness and knowledge, specifically, to Mark Edwards, Michael Jameson, and Ted and Brenda Courtney, and to Toni Raubitschek who advised me to give up the topic if I began to internalize it too much. Fortunately, I'm still smiling. I very much wish that Jack Winkler were able now to see the finished product. I am also grateful for the opportunities I have had to present some analyses to discerning audiences at various conferences and universities. Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 incorporate materials published in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, *Classical World*, and *Text and Presentation* vols. 9 and 11. I thank the editors of these journals for their helpful criticisms and suggestions, and for permission to use this material here. I owe a particular debt to Ruth Scodel who has spent considerable time helping me sharpen my arguments, and to Mary Lefkowitz and Hugh Lloyd-Jones who were rightly critical as I entered my professional career. Anton van Hooff posed critical questions in his own work and to me personally, and to him I owe *charis*. I am thankful to Texas A&M University, from which I received a summer research grant that allowed me the time I needed to concentrate on and complete this manuscript. My present and former colleagues at Texas A&M, Steve Oberhelman, Tim Moore and Craig Kallendorf, have also contributed in many profound ways to this book, and I am grateful to them for their continuing interest and support in many aspects of my life.

Elise P. Garrison
College Station, Texas
1994

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ending a wretched life is pardonable when someone suffers more evils than are endurable.

Hecuba 1107–8

Pōs zēn chrēn; How must one live? The question pervades Greek literature from Homer through Aristotle and beyond. Yet in the complicated world of extant Greek tragedy of conflicting allegiances to self or to society, of tensions between tradition and contemporaneity, of confrontations between civic and family obligations and between religion and politics, of the chasm between divine and mortal or of the equally crucial and basic contrast of human existence, the difference between male and female, the more significant issue becomes *ti zēn chrēn*? *Why* must one live? That tragic inquiry, which very often because of pressures beyond one's control is answered *dei gar thanein me* (I must die. *Alc.* 320), gives way to the corollary question *pōs an oloiman* (How should I die? *Alc.* 865). Astonishingly often suicide provides tragic characters with the resolution. In 13 of the 32 extant Attic tragedies (including the *Alcestis*) suicide or self-sacrifice figures prominently whether actual, threatened or contemplated. In 10 other scripts it plays a significant incidental role, and in some dramas more than a single instance of suicide occurs. All three tragedians use the motif of suicide for exploring the interrelationships of tragic figures with family, political systems or the gods, for exploring the actions of an idealized individual within an ethical context.[1]

[1] For the first study of ancient suicide that comprehensively collected all instances of historical and literary suicide in Greek literature, see R. Hirzel, "Der Selbstmord," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* (Leipzig 1908) 75ff, 243ff, 417ff. Reprint Darmstadt 1966. In his philosophical approach to suicide, Hirzel aimed at tracing the evolution of attitudes toward suicide from antiquity to 19th-century Germany. Through a chronological survey he assembled virtually all of the literary references to suicide which were available in 1908, and this in itself produces an immensely useful study. He was interested primarily, however, in showing how art and life react and respond to each other. A recent compilation can be found in A.J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (Routledge 1990), which provides an up-to-date assembly of instances of ancient suicide and includes discussion of both Greek and Roman suicide. See also his "Female Suicide. Between Ancient

How and why? How to live? How to die? Why live? Why die? These two double-edged questions suggest a two-pronged approach to the study of tragic suicide, an approach that combines the thematic question "how" with the theoretical question "why." That is, how do the tragedians manipulate the suicide motif, and why do their characters opt for self-imposed death? Or, in other words, with what dramatic devices do the playwrights examine the particular imagery and theatricality of suicide, and what is the broader interpretation of the function of suicide in the social and ethical background of individual plays? The answer to the practical question "how" is multivalent. Dramatic motifs combined with suicide enhance our understanding of each playwright's repertoire. The theoretical approach, the "why" of suicide, assumes an ethical framework, and underlies and unites my work. What motivates characters to commit suicide? Four major categories of motivations exist, and I have organized chapters two through five accordingly: to avoid disgrace and preserve an honorable reputation; to avoid further suffering; to end grief; and to sacrifice oneself for a greater good. Vengeance often plays a secondary role in characters' self-destruction.[2] The practical approach in combination with the theoretical one effectively reveals the nature of tragic suicide to be for the most part noble, courageous, resolute and socially motivated. Notably, victims who commit suicide in tragedy are never condemned out-of-hand and tend to be regarded sympathetically. My conclusion focusses on the *Helen* because suicide in all of its ethical and theatrical aspects occurs, while the lighter tone of the drama allows us to stand back for final observations on the phenomenon.

Fiction and Fact," *Laverna* 3 (1992) 142–72. Other useful works on suicide include K.A. Geiger, *Der Selbstmord im klassichen Altertum* (1888); Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopaedie* (Stuttgart 1923), "Selbstmord" II.A. 1134–5; M. Delcourt, "Le Suicide par vengeance dans la Grèce ancienne," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* CXIX (1939) 154–71; C.M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 46; W.B. Stanford, ed., *Sophocles' Ajax* (London 1963) Appendix E; K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974); A. Katsouris, "The Suicide Motif in Ancient Drama," *Dioniso* 47 (1976) 5–36; Y. Grisé, *Le Suicide dans la Rome antique* (Montreal 1982) 167–92; B. Seidensticker, "Die Wahl des Todes bei Sophokles," in *Sophocles. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* XXIX (Geneva 1982) 105–54; R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London and Ithaca 1985) 95–9; P. Walcot, "Suicide, a Question of Motivation," in *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster I*, edd. J.H. Betts, J.T. Hooker and J.R. Green (Bristol 1986) 231–7; and N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass. 1987), to be read with the review of B. Knox, *NYRB*, April 28, 1988.

[2] For a sustained discussion of the *causae moriendi* in ancient reality and literature, see van Hooff (above, note 1) chapter 3.

My purpose in chapter one is to provide a reasonable theoretical background within the parameters of the ancient Athenian ethical belief system in order to uncover important aspects of suicide in Greek tragedy. It is true that much of the ethical construct typically presented relies heavily on Greek literature, but as Pearson[3] eloquently points out, first, Greek education was literary, and "whether by their intention or not, the poets were the teachers of Greece until the sophists and philosophers took over their task" (11). Secondly, Plato found fault with popular ethics "because of its indebtedness to the literary tradition, because it believes that there were valuable lessons to be learnt from Homer and other poets of the past . . . the strength of his convictions is the surest proof that literary tradition had an overwhelming influence on popular ethics and in the ethical training of the young" (32–3). Before I proceed in chapters two through six to examine the various thematic manifestations of the suicide motif in Greek tragedy in light of the ethical framework, I devote chapter one to a brief sketch of the general ethical climate of the fifth century and to a sustained discussion of the particular set of possible attitudes in the Athenian population toward suicide as an exhibition of violent death. These postures correspond with two concepts of profound significance to Greek thought: shame and honor.[4] Society regulates the mores that, if overstepped, produce shame in an individual, and society determines the degree of honor granted. Several subcategories of suicide will emerge in this study. For the most part, the Greeks considered self-sacrifice that saved the community virtuous. Suicidal obedience to orders in battle is praised. Institutional suicide though a complex issue carries no stigma. Suicide out of shame or guilt or fear of dishonor is commendable, while suicide out of laziness or cowardice is condemned. Suicide to restore one's honor is embraced approvingly, and often includes curses on the proximate (perceived or real) causes of self-destruction.

Treating the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides thematically rather than chronologically, I focus on suicide victims in the context of the whole plays. Tragedy, despite its mythological setting, treats social and moral issues of concern to all audiences. The tension in tragedy between the past and the present, and between tradition and change, imbues the medium with life. If a

[3] L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford 1962).

[4] See Hirzel (above, note 1) esp. sections 1 and 2; E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the*

classicist's role is to understand drama to as great an extent as possible in its own cultural setting, then it will prove fruitful to attempt to establish the fifth-century audience's attitudes toward self-destruction. In other words, is there an automatic distance playwrights must overcome between their suicide victims and their audience? Or, conversely, can they rely on a tolerance and sympathy for their characters, and even use suicide to highlight their nobility? The answers to these questions lie within a larger ethical framework that encompasses not only the notions of shame and honor, but also, among others, the concepts of *philia*, *aretē*, *aidōs*, *eukleia* and *tlemosynē*.

Pōs zēn chrēn: the ethical life

The following discussion, limited primarily to fifth-century ethical dispositions, does not pretend to be exhaustive. Indeed, any ethical system is extremely complicated, and the Greek one more so in part because of its distance from our own. Each concept that I introduce already has received full, book-length treatment, or at least deserves full treatment, and therefore to review in detail what other thinkers have previously presented is superfluous.[5] The Greek language is replete with value terms, which are in any language notoriously difficult to understand and translate because different agents may interpret the same value term in different ways.[6] My purpose is to present as

Irrational (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951) passim; Dover (above, note 1) esp. 236–42; Walcot (above, note 1) passim; and van Hooff (above, note 1) esp. chapter 3.

[5] The bibliography on the subject of ancient ethics is massive. I list here those works that have been especially influential on my thinking. For further references I refer the reader to the bibliographies therein. F.R. Earp, *The Way of the Greeks* (London 1929; reprint 1971); R.B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge 1951); A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960); Pearson (above, note 3); J.H. Finley, *Four Stages of Greek Thought* (Stanford 1966); P. Huby, *Greek Ethics* (New York 1967); A.W.H. Adkins, *From the Many to the One. A Study of Personality and Views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values, and Beliefs* (Ithaca 1970); H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971); H.D. Oakeley, *Greek Ethical Thought from Homer to the Stoics* (New York 1971); A.W.H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece from Homer to the end of the Fifth Century* (New York 1972); Dover (above, note 1); N.R.E. Fisher, *Social Values in Classical Athens* (London 1976); M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge 1986); M.W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge 1989); J.H. Riker, *Human Excellence and an Ecological Conception of the Psyche* (Albany 1991); B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley 1993).

[6] For a discussion of the problems inherent in value-terms, see Adkins, *MV* (above, note 5) 5–7.

succinctly as possible and in easily accessible terms the general ethical background informing and motivating tragic suicide victims. The nuances of each of these moral precepts and notions will be explored further in ensuing chapters, where they can be put into the specific context of suicide. The tragic world is by definition an artificial one because, though it takes its themes from the chronologically distant world of myth, it adapts them to the fifth century by challenging and reexamining the heroic moral code. Nevertheless, an audience brings with it certain preconceptions and moral stances against which it may judge the action and characters of drama. Characters in tragedy face alternatives, one of which may be taboo according to the ethical code.[7] This is not to say that the average Athenian attending tragedies identified exactly with an Ajax or an Antigone, but throughout the history of humankind ordinary observers react to, learn from, criticize and internalize the actions and thoughts of literary or fictional characters. Greek tragedy was extremely popular, implying that the audience as well as the characters were grappling with the same issues, and that we can consequently discover aspects of popular ethics from the plays. At the same time, popular ethics by its very nature is more ambiguous than moral philosophy, and therefore characters often seem paradoxical. It is this very paradox and *im*balance that prompts suicide, and consequently allows us to reflect on the proper equilibrium necessary for a balanced existence.

In order to present a coherent, though brief, discussion of the necessarily complicated world of popular values and ethics, I will look at (i) the elements necessary for proper behavior, (ii) improper behavior and (iii) the consequences of proper or improper behavior. Often one of the consequences is suicide.

(i) *Proper behavior*

Mēden agan. Nothing too much. The well-known injunction to live according to *to metron,* the mean, permeates Greek thought and may well be the essential tenet of the ancient Greek ethical system. It is the standard by which other aspects of an ethical life are measured, and, in respect to which, these diverse facets exist in either an excessive, a deficient or an appropriate quantity. Any precept for conduct results from a need, and this rule existed, apparently, to temper excess and deficiency. *To metron* represents equilibrium, and the best mix of

[7] Pearson (above, note 3) 91.

society is compiled of individuals of varying talents and strengths each living a balanced life both as an individual and as a member of a group. A person can only live in equilibrium when he or she has discovered his or her proper function, and the Greek word *aretē* commonly translated as "excellence" describes this balance. The Delphic command, *gnōthi se,* Know Thyself, encapsulates both of these ideas, for only when one knows one's proper function can one live in accordance with it in moderation.

Aiei aristeuein. Always be the best and superior to others. In other words, always live in accordance with your *aretē*, and strive to make that *aretē* incomparable. This simple statement has innumerable ramifications. First and most important is the idea of competition: a striving both within oneself and in the eyes of one's peers. One must know oneself and push one's abilities to the utmost capacity. However, there are restraints on the competition because society determines superiority. That is to say, one can only be judged superior to others *by* others, and this implies shared and basic ground rules of behavior within that rivalry. In the heroic ethos of the *Iliad*, for example, stealth is not an acceptable course of action, nor is cheating rewarded. One strives to be the best in order to receive both tangible and intangible results.[8] The tangible results are the *timai*, the prizes, while the intangible ones include *aphthiton kleos*, undying fame. The heroic ethos asks that certain goals be reached, and if they are, it is considered *kalon*, good. On the other hand, failure to meet the established goals is *aischron* or *kakon*, shameless or bad, regardless of intention.[9]

Help your Friends and Harm your Enemies.[10] If there is any one aspect of Greek ethics that we as a modern audience informed by Christianity recoil from, surely it is the second half of this injunction. And yet, it is crucial for us to examine and understand this precept if we are to appreciate fully certain characters in Greek tragedy. An individual has *philoi* and *echthroi*, friends and enemies respectively, clearly delineated and deserving treatment appropriate to that distinction. *Philoi* share common ethical traits that can be clearly defined and defended in order that the culture survive. *Echthroi* live under a different

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[8] Adkins, *MV* (above, note 5) 61, calls Greek society a "results-culture" as well as a "shame-culture."

[9] Ibid., 60.

[10] See Blundell (above, note 5) passim, for a sustained discussion of this precept.

code and therefore are not considered worthy of the same rewards that *philoi* receive. One may take revenge on an *echthros*, or even on the *echthros* of a *philos*. Several institutions are a part of *philia*, including the *oikos*, the *polis* and *xenia*. The *oikos*, or household, defines the basic social unit and the family associations therein. The *polis*, or city-state, represents the alliances and connections between *oikoi*, and establishes the larger group's religious, political, economic and military milieu. *Xenia*, or guest-friendship, defines a formal relationship that individuals or states may enter into to expand their horizons of influence. An important component of *philia* is *charis*, gratitude, and refers to reciprocity of favors. Rules of conduct exist for each of these institutions, and in order for any society to survive, that society must inculcate in individuals the values necessary for its continuation. Each of these institutions plays a critical role in Greek tragedy, and an individual's relationship or lack of relationship to one or another may precipitate suicide.

The underlying elements of each of the above mentioned precepts are varied and complex, but a cognizance of them was indispensable if one wanted to attain an ethical life. For the Greeks, to live ethically meant to have self-control and to live in a community of like-minded people.[11] *Eleutheria*, freedom, formed the base from which individuals could gain distance and examine their relationship to the values of their culture, and in turn decide their proper position in the larger society. Extremely important in this examination was the power of reason with discretion, *sōphrosynē*,[12] for with it one can achieve wisdom, *metis* and *sophia*, and control emotions and desires. Freedom, discretion and wisdom are crucial facets in the tragic suicide's decision to end life, and, notably, accomplished suicide is never only an emotional response.

The Greeks were perhaps inordinately concerned with external recognition of their individual *aretē*, and this is evidenced by their emphasis on the notions of *aidōs*, shame, and good and bad reputation, *eukleia* and *dyskleia*. Anyone who fails to live up to the demands of his or her culture feels excluded from it. Therefore, *aidōs* can be understood as a restraint on behavior because it motivates one to act in a manner consistent with social expectations.[13] If my culture will

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[11] Riker (above, note 5) 3.
[12] Pearson (above, note 3) 52, translates it as "sound intelligence."
[13] See Williams (above, note 5) esp. 94.

be angry at me and reject me for an act, and if I define myself primarily in terms of that culture, then my sense of embarrassment will prevent that act. Or, if it doesn't prevent me from performing the act, it may cause me to lie about it in order to save face. *Aidōs*, then, becomes a paradoxical idea with a double-edge, because it can have the positive influence of controlling one's behavior in light of external expectations and it can have a negative influence by seemingly necessitating lies.[14] In addition, *aidōs* may necessitate *tlemosynē*, endurance.[15] If I want to do something but am forbidden by social expectations, then I must forego my desire and endure the consequences of not doing what I wish. I may also have to endure physical suffering. This leads to a consideration of reputation, but I shall defer that consideration to section (iii) below.

While ancient Greek thought stressed the importance of freedom in choice, there was also another side of the coin, represented by *anankē*, necessity. On the human level this can be understood in terms of the demands of *aidōs*.[16] On the divine level, however, the issue is even more complicated. Though on a superficial level we may be inclined to associate *anankē* with fatalism, in fact divine necessity differs considerably from Fate. Each individual receives a *moira*, a share, that gives one rights, status and functions unaffected by events and circumstances.[17] Sometimes necessity produces the situation that requires actions, and the agent decides on a course of action accordingly. Frequently necessity is at work undercover, and comes to light only after the agent has performed the act that moves the mortal and immortal along parallel planes.[18] This necessity implies a world order, which in Greek terms is *dikē*, justice.[19] Zeus, of course, oversees *dikē*, yet *dikē* seems to suggest a natural rather than moral law. However, the gods guaranteed the moral order of the universe, and fifth-century thinkers like Sophocles believed that the gods were just, albeit difficult to understand.[20] As moral guarantors of human institutions, the gods provide a backdrop for human conduct, even though their ways are inscrutable.

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[14] Pearson (above, note 3) 42.
[15] Williams (above, note 5) 38–40.
[16] See Williams (above, note 5) 103.
[17] Adkins, *MV* (above, note 5) 91.
[18] See Williams (above, note 5) 139.
[19] Lloyd-Jones (above, note 5) passim.
[20] Ibid., 128.

In this world order, there was a strict gender distinction.[21] Most of what I have described thus far applies to men, although often in Greek tragedy, women internalize the male code and act accordingly. The particular *aretē* of the fifth-century woman, according to Thucydides in Pericles' Funeral Oration, is to be silent and not to be talked about. The female sphere is the private one of household management and child rearing, of separate housing quarters, of isolation and protection from the outside world. Wives of citizens left their houses to obtain water or for religious festivals and funerals only.

(ii) *Improper behavior*

If *aretē* is understood as a striving for excellence within the context of the limits of social expectations, then its obvious violation is to transgress those accepted limits. The gravest error, *adikia* or *hamartia*, in the Greek world was *hybris*, pride, better translated as a disregard for limits.[22] *Mega phronein*, to be haughty, is often used synonymously with *hybris*, and both may bring disfavor (*phthonos*) from fellow humans and the gods. One may be hybristic in deed or in attitude. Closely related is the notion of *koros*, surfeit or insolence, because it breeds *hybris*.[23] On the other hand, behavior or character may be deemed *kakon* simply because one has failed, unintentionally, to live up to one's *aretē*. The word *kakon* is used in many situations, and can refer to physical infirmities, moral failings, emotional and spiritual responses like anger and impiety, a change in one's social status, or externally imposed problems.

Since *sophrosynē* plays such a crucial role in Greek thought, its opposite, *anoia*, lack of understanding, is a *kakon*. To be called *axenos*,

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[21] Pertinent bibliography includes: D.C. Richter, "The Position of Women in Classical Athens," *CJ* 67 (1971) 1–8; S.B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1975); E. Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Baltimore 1981); A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, edd., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Ann Arbor 1983); E. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York 1985); H.S. Versnel, "Wife and Helpmate: Women of Ancient Athens in an Anthropological Perspective," in *Asexual Symmetry: Studies in Ancient Society* (Amsterdam 1987); R. Just, *Women in Athenian Law and Life* (Routledge 1989); J. Henderson, "Women and the Athenian Dramatic Festivals," *TAPA* 121 (1991) 133–47; N. Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas About Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes*, trans. Caroline Levile (Princeton 1993).

[22] Adkins, *MV* (above, note 5) esp. 86ff.

[23] Pearson (above, note 3) 70–73 and 230 n. 4.

inhospitable, is unacceptable. Similarly, *euandria* and *tlemosynē*, courage and endurance, are terms of admiration, and their opposite, *malakia*, refers to any kind of fear or reluctance. The resolute agent is not guilty of *malakia*, and this is important in understanding ancient attitudes toward suicide. For a woman, on the other hand, boldness, *tolmē*, is a *kakon*, because it suggests she has transgressed gender lines, and if a woman hears evil rumors about herself, it is unendurable (*ouk anascheton*).

(iii) *Consequences of proper or improper behavior*
In a cultural construct where shame and results provide the impetus to action, a necessary consequence is reputation, good or bad (*eukleia* or *dyskleia*). I have a due portion (*moira*), and if I live up to my potential (*aretē*) within that *moira*, then I demarcate myself by the external recognition of my character or some defining characteristic or ability. If I act appropriately (*to prepon*) among my like-minded peers and superiors, then I have good repute (*eukleia*) and can fulfill my task of helping my culture to survive. If, however, I either act or am *perceived* to act inappropriately (*aeikes*), then I earn a bad reputation (*dyskleia*). Perhaps *atē*, delusion, or *mania*, madness, brought about by the gods caused me to act inappropriately, but since failure itself is *aischron* regardless of intention or external forces, I still am susceptible to ill-repute. I, therefore, fail to instill a belief in the culture to which I belong. For a significant number of tragic suicides, reputation is the single-most important factor in their decisions to destroy themselves. Logically, since societal expectations may dictate self-destruction, suicides are admired rather than condemned.

Important in any ethical construct that includes gods is the relationship between mortals and immortals. If one respects the relationships that the gods uphold, like the *oikos*, the *polis* and *xenia*, then one earns the reputation of being *hosios*, pious, and *eusebēs*, reverent toward the gods,[24] and loyal and fair toward fellow mortals. Conversely, if one fails to respect the institutions sanctioned by the gods, one is *anosios* or *asebēs*, and at odds with one's social milieu. However, given the inscrutability of the gods' ways, it is often difficult for one to be clear about what is *hosion* or not, and a single act can be both simultaneously.

Failure to behave in accordance with one's due portion, whether

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[24] Adkins, *MR* (above, note 5) 132ff.

one knows it or not, causes repercussions for society at large. The Greek word for this is *miasma*, pollution.[25] *Miasma* is a complex, metaphysical, non-moral term that covers activities from dreams to murder, the common thread being activities that inspire in society awe and dread.[26] It is a term that explains otherwise inexplicable events, and therefore appears to be a supernatural response. One's "dirt" may, and usually does, spill over onto innocent bystanders and fellow citizens, creating the need for a scapegoat so that society may cleanse itself of the pollutant. Nonetheless, at least so far as suicide victims are concerned, society often pities the pollutant.

Though this discussion has been necessarily brief, and though many more elements of the Greek ethical system could be introduced and the terms perfected, we are now in a position to turn to the question of suicide in particular. My purpose is to place suicide specifically in this ethical construct by examining attitudes toward self-destruction from texts other than tragedy, and thus to refine the concepts accented so far when we turn to individual suicides in Greek tragedy.

Attitudes toward suicide in ancient Greece

In his authoritative study *Miasma*, Robert Parker defines pollution "as a kind of institution, the metaphysical justification for a set of conventional responses to the disruption of life through violent death."[27] It is not so much a rationalization as a vehicle for expressing social disruption. Suicide, as a violent death, threatens to pollute society. Parker, however, assigns "extra pollution" to suicides, i.e., pollution beyond that associated with death in general, a pollution that "obviously derives from that same moral revulsion against suicide that caused punitive measures to be taken against the corpse."[28] Parker's brief and sweeping statement about the punishment of the corpses of suicides raises significant questions about the typical ancient attitude toward suicide, and it is important to reexamine the evidence Parker has collected, and to create a larger picture of attitudes

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[25] R. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983); Williams (above, note 5) 59ff; and Adkins, *MR* (above, note 5) 94ff.

[26] Adkins, *MR* (above, note 5) 93.

[27] Parker (above, note 25) 120.

[28] Ibid., 42.

toward suicide in antiquity by examining sources he omits.[29] The sources on suicide in ancient Greece provide complex and sometimes contradictory evidence, but one overwhelming fact emerges: to the socially minded Greeks of classical Greece social significance attached to suicide, and also very little odium or repulsion. I propose to support this statement by looking at suicide along two avenues: through descriptive sources that deal with the actual deed and its repercussions (epigraphic evidence, oratory and post fifth-century literary evidence) or that reflect popular attitudes (fifth-century history) and through prescriptive sources that try to rationalize popular attitudes (Plato and Aristotle).[30] My conclusion agrees with Parker's concerning the importance of the social ramifications of suicide. However, in terms of his suggestion of categorical mistreatment of suicide corpses, my conclusion in some ways differs, because the relative silence of the sources on the treatment of suicide corpses leads to the logical conclusion that these corpses were considered mostly normal corpses. If these corpses were abnormal, one would expect explicit mention of the pollution above and beyond the pollution that results from death of any kind. The view of suicide that will emerge encompasses the importance of the ideas of shame, honor and other ethical stances in motivation, and the distinction between cowardly and courageous self-destruction, for the eternally disturbing phenomenon of suicide clearly engendered contradictory feelings then as now.[31]

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[29] In fact, Parker bases his statement on very few sources; namely, *LSCG* 154b 33–6; Plut. *Them.* 22–2; Harpocration, s.v. *oxythumia*; DL. 6.61; Aesch. 3.244. Of course, the question of suicide pollution forms only a small part of Parker's argument and so, though he does not necessarily misinterpret the cited sources, he simply does not cite enough. Van Hooff (above, note 1) gathers most of the sources, including artistic ones, but he excludes many of the sources I will discuss. In particular, he omits the epigraphic evidence, and threats, which as I will show are important for understanding the ancient attitude.

[30] These are not, of course, mutually exclusive categories, and attitudes gleaned from one subdivision will affect interpretations of others. Likewise, the distinction between generally Greek and specifically Athenian is difficult to maintain, though the majority of the sources under discussion here are Athenian.

[31] For a discussion of the complexities of moral attitudes towards suicide throughout history, see M.P. Battin, *Ethical Issues in Suicide* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1982). For the evolution of Greek, Roman and Christian attitudes, see van Hooff (above, note 1) esp. chapter 6.

Descriptive evidence

In this section I will first treat sources concerning actual suicide in an attempt to modify Parker's conclusion, and secondly, I will briefly examine popular attitudes to suicide outside the tragic texts in a sociological context, because underlying this book is the assumption that suicide is a response to social pressures. Though Durkheim first articulated this phenomenon in 1897,[32] it is one clearly evidenced in the ancient writers. Human conflict with the values abstracted from individual rules persists in any society. Very often this conflict results in suicide because an individual may feel a sense of shame, that is, a feeling of inadequacy in the eyes of others, from failure to fulfill the requirements of membership in a network of *philia*, or dishonor by external society for failure to abide by its rules. Many suicides in ancient Greece take place because victims resolve to regain lost honor and to restore equilibrium to society.

I. *Inscriptions, oratory and post fifth-century evidence*

From Cos there is an inscription of the first part of the third century B.C. which records traditional rules relating to ritual purity.[33] This heavily restored inscription falls into three parts, the first two of which deal with the cults of Demeter at Olympia on Cos and perhaps at Isthmia on Cos respectively.[34] The third part lists unsystematically sacrilegious violations in need of purification, and these rules seem sometimes to belong to particular cults but sometimes to have general application. The whole text concerns itself with pollution to shrines and priests and also with pollution that affects the whole community. Lines 17–36 of this third section lay out procedures to be followed for pollution from death, including that from an open grave or a human bone. They specify that if death pollutes a sacred place, the god's statue must be carried out and washed, a propitiatory sacrifice must be offered and the whole shrine must be purified. In all instances kin or *kyrioi*, if any, are responsible for burying the dead;

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[32] See Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of Durkheim's theory of suicide.

[33] R. Herzog, *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Nr. 6. Heilige Gesetze von Kos* (Berlin 1928) 20–5; and F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris 1969) 154.

[34] Restored by Herzog on the basis of Section A.I.18.

if there are no kin, the task falls to the demesmen (29–32).[35] The inscription then discusses cases of suicide by hanging (33–6):

> [If anyone in a deme hangs himself] with a rope, let the first to see him release [the corpse and cover it with clothing]. And let the one who sees it cut down the wood from which (the suicide) hanged himself, [carry it and] the rope [out and burn them]. If a priest should see (the corpse), [let him bid the first passerby] to do this (my translation).[36]

Clearly, with its many restorations the inscription leaves us with a plausible yet far from certain reconstruction. For example, in l.35 the phrase *heimati katakalupsatō* is reconstructed based on *Ajax* 915ff and Theocritus 23.36ff and 52ff.[37] Nonetheless, we can perhaps tender the following conclusions. In the context of the immediately preceding lines, presumably unburied suicide corpses also fall under the kin-burial rule, with an additional consideration: namely, not only is there pollution from death, but also pollution from the material objects used in committing the suicide, and just as is true of murder by persons unknown or killing by non-humans the weapon is "punished" (e.g., Dem. 23.76; *Ath. Pol.* 57.4; *Pol.* 8.120; Aesch. 3.244).[38] With suicide there is no other person to purify or prosecute, so apparently the instrument becomes the focus of the purification process. A priest, of course, like shrines and statues, is susceptible to a greater amount of pollution than the layman. Certainly this passage gives no indication of punitive measures to be taken against the actual corpse.

A more difficult passage to interpret occurs in Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles* 22.2, where he describes another case of self-destruction by hanging:

> This temple he established near his house in Melite, where now the public officers cast out the bodies of those who have been put to death, and carry forth the garments and the nooses of those who have dispatched themselves by hanging (B. Perrin, Loeb translation).[39]

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[35] For similar kin-burial responsibilities, see Dem. 43.57–8.

[36] αἰ δέ τίς κα ἔν τινι δάμωι ἀπάγξηται σχοι]νιδίωι, ὁ ἰδὼν πράτιστον καταλυσά[τω τὸν νεκρὸν καὶ εἵματι καταλυψάτω· τὸ] δὲ ξύλον ἐξ οὗ κα ἀπάγξηται, ἀπο[ταμὼν ἐξενεικάτω καὶ κατακαυσάτω καὶ τ]ὸ σχοινίον ὁ ἰδών. αἰ δέ κα ἱερεὺς ἴδηι [τὸν παριόντα πράτιστον κελέσθω ταῦτα πο]ιεῖν.

[37] Herzog (above, note 33).

[38] See D.M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens. Aspects of Greek and Roman Life* (Ithaca 1978) 117.

[39] . . . πλησίον δὲ τῆς οἰκίας κατεσκεύασεν ἐν Μελίτῃ τὸ ἱερόν, οὗ νῦν τὰ σώματα τῶν θανατουμένων οἱ δήμιοι προβάλλουσι καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ τοὺς βρόχους τῶν ἀπαγχομένων καὶ καθαιρεθέντων ἐκφέρουσιν.

Plutarch has just described the growing dislike of the Athenians for Themistocles, a dislike fueled by Themistocles' erection of a shrine to Artemis Aristoboule, of Best Counsel, which implies that he himself had given the best counsel to all Greece. Plutarch then gives a piece of information apparently current in his day, but he enlightens us with neither when nor how the Artemis Aristoboule shrine acquired this dubious distinction,[40] and his conflation of a piece of fifth-century information with a practice current in the second century renders interpretation even more difficult. He seems to make a distinction between the corpses of criminals and suicides, the former corpses explicitly said to be cast out, the latter not mentioned at all except as regards their clothes and the instruments of death. Perhaps we can assume that since suicide corpses were in the charge of kin who would be required to take care of them appropriately (cf. the Coan law on unburied corpses discussed above), they were not brought to the Artemis shrine. Implicitly, however, Plutarch, like Plato in *Laws* 9 (see below), seems to distinguish between treatment of criminal corpses and suicides, but he also seems to suggest that even the clothes of suicides pick up and possibly transmit the pollution inherent in a normal corpse.

In the Temple Chronicle of the Temple of Athena on Rhodes, Timachidas of Lindos, writing around 100 B.C., reports what seems to be an early fifth-century instance of a corpse found hanging in the temple.[41] The text has four parts: A, the notice to create the inscription; B and C, lists of Temple dedications made by figures from myth, like Minos and Heracles, to historical figures, including Alexander the Great and Philip V; and D, the so-called "Epiphanies" of Athena, and records of cases from the opening of the fifth century down to at least 305/4 B.C.[42] Of interest to our discussion is the second epiphany that records the following event.

> In the time of the priest of the Sun, Pythannas, son of Archipolos in Lindos, someone enclosed himself in secret during the night and hanged

[40] Professor Michael Jameson suggests that he suspects assimilation to Hekate before whose roadside images *oxythumia* (trees used for hanging oneself) were piled. Cf. also Plato's *Laws* 873b4–6 where a criminal is thrown out where three roads meet outside the city. See also M. Puhvel, "The Mystery of the Cross-Roads," *Folklore* 87 (1976) 167–77.

[41] *FGrH* IIIb532D(2).

[42] For a discussion of collected works of "Epiphanies," see *FGrH* IIIb334. Istros F 50–53; M. Rostovtzeff, *Klio* 16 (1919) 203ff.

> himself from the stays of the props attached to the wall behind the statue. When the Lindians wanted to send to Delphi and inquire about what had happened, the goddess appeared to the priest in a dream and told him not to be concerned about her, but to remove the part of the roof above the statue to expose it and to leave it thus for three days. When it had been cleansed by the baths of her father (rain), she told him to replace the roof just as it was formerly, and having purified the temple with the customary materials, to sacrifice to Zeus in the ancestral fashion (my translation).[43]

Clearly, this passage concerns pollution of the statue, which would be polluted by any death in a sanctuary. The passage makes no explicit mention of the actual corpse, and we assume perhaps some similar disposal as that specified by the Coan rules, that the rope will be burned and the corpse buried by his kin. To assign extra pollution here goes beyond the available evidence.[44]

Often in discussions of suicide, as we have noted, the implements used to commit the act receive the emphasis, as in the following definition of *oxythymia* from Harpocration, the Alexandrian lexicographer.

> Some, including Aristarchus, say that *oxythymia* are the trees from which some hang themselves because of treating the spirit bitterly. And cutting these down, they cast them beyond the border and burn them (my translation).[45]

Here again, what is in contact with a suicide is polluting—in this passage, the instrument which receives the same treatment that any inanimate murder weapon would, and which becomes the focal point

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[43] 'Επ' ἱερέως τοῦ 'Αλίου Πυθαννᾶ τοῦ 'Αρχιπόλιος ἐν Λίνδωι συνκατακλαιχθείς τις λάθραι νυκτὸς αὐτὸν ἀπεκρέμασε ἐκ τῶν ἀντηρίδων τᾶν κατὰ νώτου τοῦ ἀγάλματος ποτηρεισμένων τῶι τοίχωι. καὶ Λινδίων δηλομένων εἰς Δελφοὺς ἀποστεῖλαι καὶ διερωτᾶσαι περὶ τοῦ συμβεβακότος τί δεῖ ποιεῖν, ἁ θεὸς ἐπιστᾶσα τῶι ἱερεῖ καθ' ὕπνον ποτέταξε ἡσυχίαν ἔχειν περὶ αὐτᾶς, τᾶς δὲ ὀροφᾶς γυμνῶσαι τὸ ἐπάνω τοῦ ἀγάλματος μέρος καὶ ἐᾶσαι οὕτως ἔστε κα τρεῖς ἅλιοι γένωνται καὶ τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς ἁγνισθῆι λου[τ]ροῖς, ἔπειτα τὰν μὲν στέγαν πάλιν ἐπισκευάξαι καθάπερ ἦν πρότερον, τὸν δὲ ναὸν καθάραντα τοῖς νομιζομένοις θύειν κατὰ τὰ πάτρια Διὶ ...

[44] Parker (above, note 25) 185, n. 228, wonders if this is an actual case of "morally coercive suicide" of the type found in Herodotus 7.141.2 or Thucydides 3.81.3, or like that used by Aeschylus in *Suppliant Maidens* 459–79. However, in all these cases the pollution (or threat of pollution) surely results from death itself, not suicide per se. Parker's query simply cannot be answered. The important common point, however, is that the corpse itself is not punished nor is there mention of extra pollution from it. In effect, Parker conflates the punishment of the corpse with the punishment of the suicide implements.

[45] ἔνιοι μέν, ὧν ἐστι καὶ 'Αρίσταρχος, ὀξυθύμια λέγεσθαί φασι τὰ ξύλα ἀφ' ὧν

for purification from the pollution of death. The passage does not support any suggestion that the corpse itself suffers mistreatment.

We have only two pieces of evidence from the fifth and fourth centuries suggesting the possibility of punitive measures taken against the actual suicide victim; neither of these witnesses is compelling, and both of them, as it happens, are omitted by Parker from his discussion. Lysias 12, *Against Eratosthenes*, dated 403 B.C., provides clear evidence against punitive measures taken against suicide corpses. At 12.96 Lysias describes some horrors that occurred during the reign of the Thirty.

> . . . others they tore from their children, their parents and their wives, and compelled to self slaughter and then did not even allow them to be given the customary burial, conceiving their own authority to be proof against the vengeance of heaven (W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb translation).[46]

Though at first glance this passage may seem to suggest some connection between self-slaughter and a prohibition against customary burial, closer inspection is revealing. Certainly there is no grammatical reason to postulate a cause and effect between the two events. *Kai ouden* (not *hōste*) suggests something "in addition to," not "with the result that," some further disgrace inflicted by the Thirty, who were eager to avoid the negative publicity customary funerals would produce, yet seemed unwilling to forbid burial completely. At 18, for example, Lysias states that Polemarchus, a victim compelled by the Thirty to drink hemlock, although denied prothesis in any of his houses in Athens, was nevertheless laid out in a hut *also in Athens*. In this case, neither did his "criminal" status bring public mistreatment (cf. Plut. *Them.* 22.2), nor did his institutional suicide[47] (cf. Plato *Laws* 9) direct any additional revulsion upon him, although Lysias here for rhetorical purposes treats compulsion to kill oneself as worse than

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ἀπάγχονταί τινες, ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀξέως τῷ θυμῷ χρῆσθαι. ταῦτα δ' ἐκκόπτοντες ἐξορίζουσι καὶ καίουσι.

[46] . . . τοὺς δὲ ἀπὸ τέκνων καὶ γονέων καὶ γυναικῶν ἀφέλκοντες φονέας αὑτῶν ἠνάγκασαν γενέσθαι καὶ οὐδὲ ταφῆς τῆς νομιζομένης εἴασαν τυχεῖν, ἡγούμενοι τὴν αὑτῶν ἀρχὴν βεβαιοτέραν εἶναι τῆς παρὰ τῶν θεῶν τιμωρίας.

See also 12.45 where Lysias refers to citizens who were forced to perish by a "most shameful and ignominious death," where clearly he intends not to reproach the dead, but rather to express the revulsion directed against the Thirty. See Dover (above, note 1) 242.

[47] Institutional suicide, so-called because of external pressure or coercion to perform it (e.g., the suttee in India or harakiri in Japan), is technically suicide since the

being murdered.[48] The Lysias passage suggests two important observations: first, Lysias treats institutional suicide as suicide, as did Plato (see below), and second, in his indignation at the poverty of his brother's funeral, Lysias takes it for granted that his brother should have had a normal funeral. Socrates also expected a normal funeral, as he showed by bathing before drinking the hemlock to spare the women the trouble later. In other words, those who drank hemlock had expectations of regular funeral honors. This is in contrast to corpses of executed criminals which were thrown into a *barathron* and, although technically buried, lacked ordinary rites.

Aeschines' speech of 330 B.C., *Against Ctesiphon* 244, besides the evidence concerning the treatment of murder weapons (see above), provides a second piece of evidence concerning the mistreatment of suicide corpses.

> When sticks and stones and iron, voiceless and senseless things, fall on anyone and kill him, we cast them beyond the borders, and when a man kills himself the hand that did the deed is buried apart from the body (C.D. Adams, Loeb translation).[49]

This passage provides the only clear testimony concerning Athens at least (but see below concerning other places) for any sort of punish-

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victim accomplishes the act. In Japan harakiri was compulsory as a form of punishment for those of noble rank, allowing them to die by their own hand rather than at an executioner's, and thereby to retain their dignity. In ancient Greece there is little evidence to suggest this explanation, and surely the Thirty would not be concerned with the question of "dignity" in the death of their opponents. Though Socrates certainly dies with dignity, there is no mention that this was the authority's intention. Perhaps "institutional suicide" provided the authorities with a way to avoid pollution (a close parallel provided by Creon's motive for burying Antigone alive rather than killing her in the *Antigone*), but when the practice of using hemlock for execution began and in which ways it superseded the other methods of execution is unknown (see MacDowell [above, note 38] 255). For sociological discussions of the phenomenon of institutional suicide, see e.g., N.L. Farberow, "Cultural History of Suicide," in *Suicide in Different Cultures*, ed. N.L. Farberow (Baltimore 1975) 1–16; A. Venkoba Rao, "Suicide in India," in *Suicide in Different Cultures* 231–8; M. Iga and K. Tatai, "Characteristics of Suicides and Attitudes toward Suicide in Japan," in *Suicide in Different Cultures* 255–80; and D. de Catanzero, *Suicide and Self-Damaging Behavior. A Sociobiological Perspective* (New York 1981) 27–8.

[48] See also Xenophon, *Hell.* II.3.56, where Theramenes after drinking hemlock pours out the last few drops in (sarcastic) tribute to Critias. Xenophon's remark is telling: "Now I am not unaware of this that these are not sayings worthy of record; but I deem it admirable in the man that when death was close at hand, neither self-possession nor the spirit of playfulness departed from his soul."

[49] . . . εἰ τὰ μὲν ξύλα καὶ τοὺς λίθους καὶ τὸν σίδηρον, τὰ ἄφωνα καὶ τὰ ἀγνώμονα, ἐάν τῳ ἐμπεσόντα ἀποκτείνῃ, ὑπερορίζομεν, ἐάν τις αὑτὸν διαχρήσηται, τὴν χεῖρα τὴν τοῦτο πράξασαν χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος θάπτομεν, . .

ment of the corpse of a suicide victim. Several observations, however, need to be made. Most obvious is the connection Aeschines makes between objects which kill, whether inanimate things or one's own hand. In both cases, the instrument of the destruction must somehow be isolated, because in Greek thought it is necessary to localize guilt in order to cast off anxiety and reestablish equilibrium. Here, guilt is placed in the hand alone, which thus cannot be buried with its victim, who would be offended.[50] Secondly, since this is the only reference to such treatment of a suicide, we wonder how regularly the cutting off of a hand occurred. In the third place, the context of this speech must be kept in mind, especially in light of the distinction between cowardly and honorable suicide that is an important distinction in the discussions of Plato and Aristotle (see below). Though ostensibly against Ctesiphon, the speech primarily seeks to discredit Demosthenes as the instigator of the disastrous battle of Chaeronea, and the rhetorical context advises caution in interpretation. Aeschines equates Demosthenes, the betrayer of soldiers, with the treacherous sticks and stones that kill someone and the hand that kills its own body. Aeschines here makes no mention of the kind of suicide he has in mind, that is to say, whether the suicide who suffers this punishment committed a cowardly or noble act, but earlier in the speech Aeschines has suggested that on occasion suicide is the honorable solution, for at 212 he states that Demosthenes is so contemptuous of civic honor that he will not kill himself if he fails. Though Aeschines refers perhaps to a ritualized custom that in and of itself may not make a fine moral distinction, nevertheless throughout the oration the thrust is that Demosthenes proved a coward, and perhaps 244 should be interpreted with the cowardly/noble distinction in mind. In other words, the coward Demosthenes deserves punishment just as a cowardly suicide does, and Aeschines appeals to *aidōs*, shame, to bring home his point demonstrating the importance of the idea to motivation in self-destruction.[51]

One other piece of courtroom evidence shows just how unfounded are statements that categorically claim punishment of the suicide corpse. In Demosthenes' speech *Against Eubulides*, dated to 345 B.C.,

[50] This same mechanism is evident in tragedy, e.g., Teucer talks about Ajax's death at the hands of Hector's sword so that Hector becomes his killer; or Antigone manipulates the audience into blaming Creon for Haemon's death, which then becomes more of a murder than a suicide.

[51] Van Hooff (above, note 1) 108.

the speaker, Euxitheus, attempts to prove that he is indeed an Athenian citizen, contrary to Eubulides' claims to the opposite. He ends his plea with an emotional outburst addressing the question of burial (57.50):

> I for my part am left without a father, but for my mother's sake I beg and beseech you so to settle this trial as to restore to me the right to bury her in our ancestral tomb. Do not deny me this; do not make me a man without a country; do not cut me off from such a host of relatives, and bring me to utter ruin. Rather than abandon them, if it prove impossible for them to save me, I will kill myself, that at least I may be buried by them in my country (A.T. Murray, Loeb translation).[52]

Though courtroom speeches are by nature designed to persuade and may thus overstate a case, nonetheless they must seem *eikos*, reasonable, to the jury. We may deduce from a passage spoken by one claiming to be an Athenian that the common practice concerning suicide corpses was similar to the disposition of any normal corpse.

We possess some very late evidence that suggests a certain uneasiness about suicide corpses, but again the context provides important points of clarification about whether a corpse is "punished." Artemidorus in *On Dreams* 1.4 records the following dream as an example of one that proclaims many things through a few images.[53]

> For instance, someone dreamed that he had lost his name. This resulted, first, in his losing his son (not only because he had lost his most prized possession, but also because his child happened to be called by the same name). Then he also lost all his possessions, since he was indicted and convicted on a charge of public misconduct. Dishonored [without civil rights] and in exile he hanged himself and died, so that he even lacks a name, now that he is dead. For only these do kin not invite to the feasts held among the dead (my translation).[54]

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[52] ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦ μὲν πατρὸς ὀρφανὸς κατελείφθην, τὴν δὲ μητέρ' ἱκετεύω ὑμᾶς καὶ ἀντιβολῶ διὰ τοῦτον τὸν ἀγῶν' ἀπόδοτέ μοι θάψαι εἰς τὰ πατρῷα μνήματα καὶ μή με κωλύσητε, μηδὲ ἄπολιν ποιήσητε, μηδὲ τῶν οἰκείων ἀποστερήσητε τοσούτων ὄντων τὸ πλῆθος, καὶ ὅλως ἀπολέσητε. πρότερον γὰρ ἢ προλιπεῖν τούτους, εἰ μὴ δυνατὸν ὑπ' αὐτῶν εἴη σωθῆναι, ἀποκτείναιμ' ἂν ἐμαυτόν, ὥστ' ἐν τῇ πατρίδι γ' ὑπὸ τούτων ταφῆναι.

[53] For a general discussion of Artemidorus see R.J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams. Oneirocritica by Artemidorus* (New Jersey 1975). For a specific discussion concerning Artemidorus' views on suicide and instances of suicide in his work, see van Hooff (above, note 1) 159ff.

[54] οἷον ἔδοξέ τις τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ὄνομα ἀπολωλεκέναι. ἀπέβη αὐτῳ τοῦτο μὲν τὸν υἱὸν ἀπολέσαι (οὐχ ὅτι τὸ τιμιώτατον ἀπώλεσε μόνον, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ ταὐτὸ ὄνομα

The passage refers not to the actual corpses, but rather the psyche,[55] and this late 2nd century A.D. reference is our first notice of a practice of exclusion. When or where it began remains unknown, and the question is further complicated because the person is at the time of his suicide a criminal, a status that in itself may account in part at least for the exclusion.[56]

Philostratus presents in his *Heroicus* a long dialogue between a Phoenician seaman and a local vintner in the Thracian Chersonese. In the dialogue, the vintner, claiming to be in contact with Protesilaus' spirit, gives a version of the Trojan war different from Homer's. The dialogue synthesizes literature, history and religion, and blends in typical sophistic manner contemporary and archaic elements.[57] Of interest to our discussion is Protesilaus' version of the judgement of arms and the treatment of Ajax after his suicide (188).

> Since the Achaeans were praising Odysseus, Teucer also praised him, but cursed the arms. For, he said, it was not good to bury the cause of death in the same tomb. And they buried him, placing his body in the earth, since Calchas declared that those who kill themselves are not lawfully buried by fire (my translation).[58]

καλούμενος ἔτυχεν ὁ παῖς) τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τὴν κτῆσιν ἀθρόαν, δικῶν τινων αὐτῷ γραφεισῶν, ἐφ' αἷς ἑάλω φεύγων γραφὴν δημοσίων ἀδικημάτων· ἄτιμός τε καὶ φυγὰς γενόμενος ἀναρτήσας ἑαυτὸν ἐτελεύτησε τὸν βίον, ὡς μηδὲ ἀποθανὼν ἔχειν ὄνομα. τούτους γὰρ μόνους ἐν νεκρῶν δείπνοις οὐ καλοῦσιν οἱ προσήκοντες.

[55] In this case the soul, by not being given full funeral rites, seems to have been thought not to enter completely into the world of the dead. For the inference of soul belief from funeral rites, see J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton 1983). Bremmer concludes that since one of the functions of the funeral rites was to help the transition of the soul into afterlife, "it may be reasonably assumed that such a transition did not take place in the case of suicides, slaves, children and adolescents" (100). He concedes, however, that there is no explicit data for the categories of suicides and slaves, and in light of my discussion his stated assumption seems questionable. What he does effectively show, though, is that even for people who died "outside the ordered social world" there is little evidence that they remained to haunt the living as ghosts or revenants (chapter 3, passim). For an anthropological/structural approach to funeral rituals, see L.M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton 1982), and the bibliography there cited.

Van Hooff (above, note 1) 160–1, also points out that we do not know the geographical span of the taboo, and that ancient authors liked to contrast the unusual habits of other peoples with their own.

[56] Although as Professor Ruth Scodel points out to me these souls are thought to be angry and therefore likely to do harm. See also van Hooff (above, note 1) 160–1.

[57] See G. Anderson, *Philostratus. Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A.D.* (New Hampshire 1986) 241–58.

[58] ἐπαινούντων δὲ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν τὸν Ὀδυσσέα ἐπῄει μὲν καὶ ὁ Τεῦκρος, τὰ δὲ ὅπλα παρῃτεῖτο· μὴ γὰρ ὅσια εἶναι ἐντάφια τὰ τοῦ θανάτου αἴτια. ἔθαψαν δὲ

The reference by Calchas to not burning suicides seems not to have come from an ancient poem, for already in the *Ilias Parva* Ajax was not cremated but inhumed.[59] In that poem, this happened "because of the anger of the king," and not because suicides must be punished.[60] In other words, though a difference in status between suicides and the normal dead may be thought to account for the prohibition from cremation, in the poem this reason is not suggested. Again, we can put no significant interpretive weight on the statement.

The Sixty-fourth Discourse, "On Fortune," ascribed to Dio Chrysostom, though its authenticity is suspect,[61] begins with a catalogue of people who have blamed fortune for their problems, e.g., Medea or Midas or Orestes (1–2). The author then proceeds to tell a Cyprian tale of Demonassa, who was gifted in statesmanship and law-giving. She reportedly gave the Cypriots three laws, the second of which records that suicides shall be cast out without burial.[62] Demonassa had two sons, one of whom died for having slain an ox (the third law of Demonassa), while the other was cast out unburied because he killed himself. Later in her career, seeing a cow lowing over a dying calf and recognizing her misfortune, she melted bronze and leaped into it (4). The author of the discourse reports a Cypriot practice, and tells us about the law of a woman who herself commits suicide in a way that precludes compliance with her law! The too-close connection between the laws and her misfortune leads us to suspect the evidence altogether, although even if the story of Demonassa is fiction, the law may be real.[63]

αὐτὸν καταθφέμενοι ἐς τὴν γῆν τὸ σῶμα, ἐξηγουμένου Κάλχαντος ὡς οὐχ ὅσιοι πυρὶ θάπτεσθαι οἱ ἑαυτοὺς ἀποκτείναντες.

[59] See E. Rohde, *Psyche. The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*, trans. W.B. Hillis (London 1950, reprint New York 1968) 187–8, n. 33, who argues against this point of view. But cf. Bremmer (above, note 41) 96, and his discussion of the distinction between inhumation and cremation in which he concludes that "the relevance of contrasting inhumation and cremation per se has to be rejected," and bases the remainder of his argument on the issue on the fact that "it would have been strange if the Greeks, with their polar way of thinking, had not used the two modes of disposal to differentiate between people according to their age and manner of their death."

[60] Though Bremmer (above, note 55) 96, suggests that this is a late explanation since suicides belonged to the class of "dead without status." But at p. 100 he admits that there is no explicit data for the "liminal" status of suicides.

[61] By H.v. Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dion von Prusa* (1898).

[62] τὸν αὐτὸν ἀποκτείναντα ἄταφον ῥίπτεσθαι· δεύτερος οὗτος Δημωνάσσης νόμος·

[63] Hirzel (above, note 1) 56, n. 1, even questions the historicity of Demonassa.

The second century A.D. paroemiographer Zenobius in Book 6.17 reports that, according to Aristotle, in Thebes those who have killed themselves receive no honor. Interestingly, Socrates and his friends, including Cebes the Theban, seem to have lacked knowledge of this prohibition, and perhaps it is no earlier than the time of Aristotle.

These writers of the Second Sophistic, though often claiming to be recording much older information and practices, are themselves largely concerned with style rather than historical or scholarly preciseness and, of course, reflect the attitudes of their time[64] rather than the attitudes of the historical periods to which they refer. For these reasons, though the evidence adduced does suggest an uneasiness about suicides that may have a traditional and long-standing background, the evidence does not suggest a categorical mistreatment of or societal revulsion from suicides.

II. *Fifth-century history*

To this point I have sought to clarify our understanding of the position on suicide in classical Greece vis-à-vis descriptive sources concerning actual suicide. As we turn now to an examination of descriptive sources that reflect popular attitudes, we find that these attitudes correspond, as stated above, to the basic concepts of shame and honor, which social values themselves represent the moral code based on the utilitarian observances of *philia* and *dikē*. Every civilized society requires a moral code, and the Athenian one permitted the development of its laws, religion and democracy. Society regulates the mores that, if overstepped, produce shame in an individual, and society determines the degree of honor granted to an individual for adhering to its standards. In other words, both shame and honor imply a scrutiny of the individual by the many, the one with a negative outcome, the other with a positive result. These social phenomena (and honor's opposite, dishonor) motivate many suicides recorded by the historians. For example, in a society imbued with the heroic code of death over dishonor, a typical impetus to suicide may be one's behavior in battle. Though Leonidas (Herodotus 7.220f) at Thermopylae might have saved himself and his small group, he chose to stay, to sacrifice himself and his men, and to receive honor by

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[64] For general comments on the writers of the Second Sophistic, see Anderson (above, note 57) especially chapters 4 and 5, and the bibliography there cited.

leaving behind a great name.[65] Though technically a self-sacrifice, in sociological theory self-sacrifice and noble suicide result from the same over-pronounced integration into society and the same willingness to die.[66] Two others of the 300 Spartans, Eurytus and Aristodemus, barred from the fight because of eye inflammation, chose differing paths: Eurytus to fight anyway; Aristodemus to survive. Eurytus, though killed instantly, received due honor while Aristodemus lived in infamy until he made amends at the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 7.228ff), though even then his death was ambiguous, since he was not called *aristos*.[67] One final survivor—Pantites—on his return to Sparta found himself in such disgrace that he hanged himself (7.232).

Thucydides, in the Corcyraean civil war episode (3.81), mentions the suicide of the Messenian prisoners who refused to be tried by their captors. Thucydides has emphasized the anomic state of affairs at Corcyra, the general chaos and despair that accompanies revolution. He then proceeds to theorize about revolution in general. Thucydides lends a "tragic" air to this kind of suicide by using the word *analiskō* in the middle voice for suicide. The basic meaning "use up" or "spend" is extended by the tragedians to "kill" and in this meaning seems primarily to be restricted to tragedy (e.g., Aesch. *Ag.* 570; Soph. *OT* 1174, Fr. 892 (Radt); Eur. *El.* 681). The Messenians committed tragic suicide to escape punishment and further disgrace. The Athenians on the Acropolis in 480 (Hdt. 8.53) acted likewise.

Herodotus relates another instance of suicide committed to escape punishment. Nitocris (2.100), Queen of Babylon, after taking revenge on the Egyptians for killing her brother, their ruler, flung herself into a room of ashes.[68]

Explicit motives of shame may be seen in the following examples from Herodotus. In 1.45 Adrastus stabbed himself from shame at his bad luck because he, though commanded by Croesus to protect Atys, instead actually killed him. In 2.131 Mycerinus the King of Egypt desired and violated his daughter, who then hanged herself because

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[65] For a similar event see Xenophon, *Hell.* IV.8.39 concerning Anaxibius.

[66] For a sustained discussion of the sociological theory of suicide, see Appendix A.

[67] I am grateful to Professor Ruth Scodel for pointing this out to me.

[68] For choking by ashes as a Persian punishment used by Darius Ochus, see Ctesias 29.48, 51, 52 in *FGrH* IIIc688. Ctesias says that Darius in order to evade an oath he had taken not to kill those caught in a conspiracy against him devised a punishment by which they would fall into a pit of ashes while asleep. Cf. Val. Max. 9.2.6 and Ovid, *Ibis* 317.

of the outrage.[69] Herodotus here uses the word *achos* to describe her state of mind, a word infrequent in prose but common in tragedy.[70] As in Thuc. 3.81 a single word helps to create a tragic atmosphere around a suicide.

Usually, neither Thucydides nor Herodotus makes any explicit value judgements concerning the suicide victims they mention. Implicitly, however, by using an evocative word, by creating a tragic atmosphere, by imputing the same motivations to Greeks and barbarians alike, and by conceding (or helping to create by the very act of recording the events without blame) pity and honor for many victims, they leave us with the sense not that suicide created "moral revulsion," but that it provided people with an honorable release from an undesirable life, a life made unbearable because of shame or dishonor, i.e., because of unfavorable societal perception. Yet, in his description of the suicide of Boges (7.107), Herodotus concludes by saying "thus it is that he is justly (*dikaiôs*) praised by the Persians to this day."[71]

Prescriptive evidence

As we turn now to the philosophical discussions of Plato (Socrates) and Aristotle, the societal considerations of shame and honor are very much under consideration, and value judgements become explicit. In this prescriptive evidence, we will note that both Plato and Aristotle distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable suicides, and their discussions underline many complexities and ambiguities involved in reactions to suicide.

Plato discusses self-destruction in the *Phaedo*,[72] a dialogue that relates the final conversation of Socrates with two young speakers,

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[69] Xenophon, *Hell.* VI.4–7, relates how the Leuctrian maidens also hanged themselves after they were violated by the Spartans.

[70] When *achos* does occur in prose, it appears in contexts concerning tragic and/or mythical figures. E.g., Xenophon, *Cyr.* V.5.6.4 and VI.1.37.5; Aristotle fr. 640.24–5 (Rose); or Antiphon (Soph), Testimonia fr. 6.10–11 (Diels/Kranz). For a discussion of the term in Sophocles, see M. Tichit, "Le terme *achos* dans l'oeuvre de Sophocle," *Revue étude grecques* 97 (1974) 189–205.

[71] Boges' suicide follows his execution of his family and servants, but all the violence is precipitated by his refusal to surrender to the Athenians. In antiquity, as van Hooff (above, note 1) 108, says, a "leader is expected to end his life if he has been defeated..."

[72] For general discussions, see A.E. Taylor, *Plato. The Man and his Work*, 4th ed.,

Simmias and Cebes, both of whom belong to the "scientific" side of the Pythagorean movement. By reminding them of the conceptions that form Pythagorean religion, Socrates points out the inconsistency of its scientific developments with its religious aspects. Socrates puts forth a moral argument by suggesting that if one has put aside all other pleasures save the pleasure of learning, then he can hope that death is the entrance to a better life (114d–115a). The discussion that leads to that conclusion gets its initial impetus from Socrates' statement that a philosopher is one who will willingly die, though to do violence to oneself is not lawful (61c).[73] The paradox that it is better to be dead but forbidden to kill oneself becomes the lemma from which Socrates can rebut an apparently absolute prohibition on suicide of the Pythagoreans,[74] a prohibition suggested by Philolaus at 61e. Socrates unravels the paradox in 62b–c by showing that just as we would be angry if one of our possessions killed itself when we had not required it to, so, too, would the gods be angry if a man kills himself before they send some necessity upon him.[75]

First, suicide is prohibited because any individual benefit (i.e., death is better than life) is outweighed by the deprivation it causes the gods.[76] He goes on to say that even after death he will be with equally wise, though apparently different, gods (63b–c), and so this "liberation" from a life under the guidance of some gods creates no new paradox. Socrates believes not only in the immortality of the soul, but also that the souls of the just are in gods' care after death as well as before. Socrates has managed to modify and explicate the Pythagorean stance on suicide by pointing out a circumstance under which self-destruction becomes permissible and acceptable[77]—namely,

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(London 1937) 174–208; K. Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto 1981); J. Eckstein, *The Deathday of Socrates* (New Jersey 1981); D. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford 1986); Nussbaum (above, note 5) 136–60.

[73] For a review of interpretations of this paradox, see Dorter (above, note 72) 11–9.

[74] See J.C.G. Strachan, "Who *did* forbid suicide at *Phaedo* 62b?" *CQ* 64 (1970) 216–20, who suggests that Plato here refers not to a Pythagorean prohibition, but rather to an Orphic one.

[75] . . . τὸ θεοὺς εἶναι ἡμῶν τοὺς ἐπιμελουμένους καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἓν τῶν κτημάτων τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι."Η σοὶ οὐ δοκεῖ οὕτως;"Εμοιγε, φησὶν ὁ Κέβης. Οὐκοῦν, ἦ δ' ὅς, καὶ σὺ ἄν, τῶν σαυτοῦ κτημάτων εἴ τι αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἀποκτιννύοι μὴ σημήναντός σου ὅτι βούλει αὐτὸ τεθνάναι, χαλεπαίνοις ἂν αὐτῷ, καί, εἴ τινα ἔχοις τιμωρίαν, τιμωροῖο ἄν; Πάνυ γ', ἔφη."Ισως τοίνυν ταύτῃ οὐκ ἄλογον μὴ πρότερον αὑτὸν ἀποκτιννύναι δεῖν, πρὶν ἀνάγκην τινὰ θεὸς ἐπιπέμψῃ, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν νῦν ἡμῖν παροῦσαν.

[76] Dorter (above, note 72) 16.

[77] Eckstein (above, note 72) 44–50, argues that the contradiction between the

when a sign is given. Furthermore, the Pythagorean stance in no way shows common practice or thought on the subject of suicide, as we have already seen.

Plato elaborates in the *Laws*.[78] This very long and practical work reflects Plato's most mature thoughts on the subjects of ethics, law and education. "More than any other work of Plato, the *Laws* stands in direct relation to the political life of the age in which it was composed and is meant to satisfy a pressing felt need."[79] Of significance for my discussion is *Laws* 9 in which the legislator introduces criminal law and punishment, and addresses questions of legal responsibility. Contemporary Athenian law and legal institutions in general provide the basis for the details,[80] and so *Laws* 9 furnishes an excellent source for a discussion of Athenian attitudes toward suicide.[81] In book 9 the Athenian first discusses "capital crimes" in descending order of gravity: sacrilege, treason and parricide. After he makes the distinction between causing hurt or loss (*blabē*) and acts of injustice (*adikia*) (861e–862c), he creates a penal code based on that distinction. He then sets out regulations for cases of homicide and suicide, penalties for which depend on the main difference between *blabē* and *adikia*, on the status of the parties, and on the distinction between involuntary homicide, homicide committed in anger, and voluntary homicide. The last category of murders "which are premeditated and spring from sheer injustice—the lack of control over the desire for pleasure and over one's lusts and jealous feelings" (869e) receive the most severe punishment, namely that "he must be punished by death and be deprived of burial in the country of his

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absolute prohibition on suicide and Socrates' conclusion that sometimes suicide is necessary points to the "incertitude of the whole argument," and argues further that the main thrust of the *Phaedo* is that Plato "is painfully opposed to Socrates' suicide." But surely he goes too far in asserting that Plato deliberately blurs Socrates' thinking on this crucial subject.

[78] See further J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy. Thales to Plato* (London 1914) 301–12; Taylor (above, note 72) 463–97; E. Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (London 1918) 292–380; E. Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York 1959) 183–207; L. Strauss, *The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago 1975); T.L. Pangle, *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago and London 1980); and R.F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws* (Indianapolis 1983).

[79] Taylor (above, note 72) 463.

[80] See G.R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City. A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (Princeton 1960) 544ff.

[81] For recent general discussions, see Pangle (above, note 78) 496–504; and Stalley (above, note 78) 137–50. Neither one, however, discusses the Athenian legislator's views on suicide.

victim. (In this way we can show he has not been forgiven, and avoid impiety.)" (871d). Those guilty of specific kin-murder will be executed by the officials, and thrown out, naked, at a specified place where three roads meet outside the city. The officials then stone the corpse's head to purify the entire state, after which the corpse is cast out beyond the borders and granted no burial (873a–b). Immediately following the outline of this severe punishment comes the Athenian's discussion of suicide (873c–d),[82] logically proceeding from a discussion of "kin-murder." If one commits suicide when it is not legally ordered by the State, or when he is not burdened by some intolerable and inevitable misfortune or disgrace that is beyond remedy, but merely kills himself because of laziness and cowardice, then unlike justifiable suicides who will be buried by their kin, the cowardly suicide will be buried in an isolated place and in the borders of the twelve districts that are barren and nameless. They will be forever infamous and will have neither a tombstone nor tombs marked with their names.

It is interesting to note the difference in tone when Plato turns to the subject of suicide, and the less harsh punishments he prescribes. Plato admits categories of acceptable suicides, and makes a clear distinction between cowardly and honorable suicide, because throughout *Laws* 9 he generally asserts that punishments for crimes must vary according to the motive and circumstance of them.[83] In addition, suicide is acceptable if ordered by the State, i.e., Plato recognizes institutional suicide. Surely Plato here recalls Socrates' end.[84] Furthermore, if one has fallen under some excruciating pressure or some unendurable disgrace, Plato implies no punishment is due, and

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[82] τὸν δὲ δὴ πάντων οἰκειότατον καὶ λεγόμενον φίλτατον ὃς ἂν ἀποκτείνῃ, τί χρὴ πάσχειν; λέγω δὲ ὃς ἂν ἑαυτὸν κτείνῃ, τὴν τῆς εἱμαρμένης βίᾳ ἀποστερῶν μοῖραν, μήτε πόλεως ταξάσης δίκῃ, μήτε περιωδύνῳ ἀφύκτῳ προσπεσούσῃ τύχῃ ἀναγκασθείς, μηδὲ αἰσχύνης τινὸς ἀπόρου καὶ ἀβίου μεταλαχών, ἀργίᾳ δὲ καὶ ἀνανδρίας δειλίᾳ ἑαυτῷ δίκην ἄδικον ἐπιθῇ. τούτῳ δὴ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θεὸς οἶδεν ἃ χρὴ νόμιμα γίγνεσθαι περὶ καθαρμούς τε καὶ ταφάς, ὧν ἐξηγητάς τε ἅμα καὶ τοὺς περὶ ταῦτα νόμους ἐπανερομένους χρὴ τοὺς ἐγγύτατα γένει ποιεῖν αὐτοῖσι κατὰ τὰ προσταττόμενα. τάφους δ' εἶναι τοῖς οὕτω φθαρεῖσι πρῶτον μὲν κατὰ μόνας μηδὲ μεθ' ἑνὸς ξυντάφου, εἶτα ἐν τοῖς τῶν δώδεκα ὁρίοισι μερῶν τῶν ὅσα ἀργὰ καὶ ἀνώνυμα, θάπτειν ἀκλεεῖς αὐτούς, μήτε στήλαις μήτε ὀνόμασι δηλοῦντας τοὺς τάφους.

[83] Stalley (above, note 78) 144.

[84] So R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Indianapolis 1955) 36, n.4. See also Eckstein (above, note 72) 48, who claims Socrates' death was a suicide not because his own hands brought the poison to his lips, but because he had alternatives of going into exile or escaping from prison.

therefore situates his thinking within the popular morality we have adduced from the orators and historians.[85] If, however, cowardice or laziness (*argia de kai anandrias deilia*)[86] motivates one's self-destruction, then the suicide victim must be buried alone, and in disgrace, in deserted places but in Athens, without a headstone. Later in the *Laws* (900e9–901c6), the legislator defines *argia* and *deilia* as elements of the soul, which, since it is the source of everything, must be the source of values: good and bad, fair and foul, just and unjust (896d).[87] Sloth is the offspring of cowardice (901e5), and cowardice is a part of badness (900e1). In other words, cowardice and laziness are intellectual properties, and so Plato implies that ignoble suicide results from a defective soul. Therefore *this* kind of suicide deserves exclusion and punishment because even god himself abhors such a character (901a6).[88] Of singular significance to a discussion of suicide in antiquity is Plato's distinction between acceptable and unacceptable suicide, a distinction we have already noted frequently. Even an unacceptable suicide receives far less punishment than a voluntary homicide. Clearly, some extra "something" attaches to certain suicide victims, but Plato makes no mention of the need to purify the entire state (as he did regarding kin-murderers), nor to deny burial altogether. Purification and burial rest in the hands of suicide victims' relatives.

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,[89] we initially encounter an encompassing condemnation of suicide, but his reasons for forbidding it put significant emphasis on its social and political ramifications. Later,

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[85] See Dover (above, note 1) 167–9, who suggests that this attitude was formed in part by their "high regard for the man who faces the instrument of death unflinchingly."

[86] This is an interesting example of hyponymy, like that in Dem. 21.160: "because of his *deilia* and *anandria*." See Dover (above, note 1) 64.

[87] See Stalley (above, note 78) 170–2.

[88] *Argia* occurs elsewhere in Plato and seems sometimes to refer to physical idleness (*Theaet.* 153b6.5–6; *Symp.* 191a8–b1; *Resp.* 398e6–7; *Resp.* 405c9–d1; *Resp.* 422a1–2; *Laws* 761a1–2), and sometimes in addition to the *Laws* passages here cited to intellectual inactivity (*Soph.* 232a7–b1; *Soph.* 267d5–6; *Symp.* 182d3–4; *Phaedr.* 259a2–3). In the *Timaeus* 89e6–7 and 91e8–92a1, he combines both physical and intellectual aspects of *argia*, stating that the soul becomes weak from lack of motion and so gets crushed into a new physical form.

[89] See H.H. Joachim, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford 1951); H.G. Apostle, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics* (Holland and Boston 1975); F.H. Eterovich, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: Commentary and Analysis* (Washington, D.C. 1980); T. Irwin, tr. *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis 1985); Nussbaum (above, note 5) esp. chapters 10 and 11.

however, Aristotle himself qualifies his sweeping prohibition. Aristotle's *Ethics* is teleological: both the State and the individual through action seek the good, which Aristotle defines as "that at which all things aim" (1.1094a1–3). The State and the individual aim at the same good, though the good in the State is greater and nobler (1.1094a27–b11). Thus ethics becomes a part of political or social science, i.e., an individual becomes explicable and can exhibit his courage (*andreia*) in terms of his interaction with his society. Aristotle defines *andreia* as "a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear, . . . and it chooses or endures things because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to do so" (3.1116a10–12). The example he chooses to illustrate this definition is suicide (3.1116a12–15).[90] It is, he states, the mark of a coward to die to escape from poverty or love or anything painful, because it exhibits softness to escape from what is troublesome. This kind of person does not die because it is noble, but only to escape evil.

Aristotle has already stated that a typical object of fear is death, because "it is the end, and nothing is thought to be any longer either good or bad for the dead" (1115a26–7). Therefore, one who faces death must have courage that enables him to endure it in the proper spirit. The prominent place Aristotle gives to suicide seems to indicate that discussions of suicide were current and typical, but needed clarification. In large part, Aristotle's discussion is very similar to Plato's. For example, suicide to escape poverty seems to be a form of Plato's suicide "from laziness and cowardice." In addition, though Aristotle uses the word *malakia,* which seems to suggest a certain perception of effeminacy surrounded suicide,[91] he carefully specifies what kind of suicide is the mark of a coward, and with more precision than Plato, he also creates a list of unacceptable suicides, which suggests that some types of suicide are acceptable.

In book 5 Aristotle discusses justice, and in what sense it is a mean. He concedes that justice is not really a mean in the way other virtues are, but in the sense that "it relates to an intermediate amount, while injustice relates to the extremes" (1133b30ff). Justice also, alone of the virtues, is thought to be another's good (1130a3f). Since this is the case, can a man treat *himself* unjustly or not (1138a4)? Aristotle

[90] τὸ δ' ἀποθνήσκειν φεύγοντα πενίαν ἢ ἔρωτα ἤ τι λυπηρὸν οὐκ ἀνδρείου, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δειλοῦ. μαλακία γὰρ τὸ φεύγειν τὰ ἐπίπονα, καὶ οὐχ, ὅτι καλὸν ὑπομένει, ἀλλὰ φεύγων κακόν.

[91] Cf. 1150b15, and Irwin (above, note 89) 354.

provides a negative answer (1138a5ff).[92] There are just acts, he suggests, which are prescribed by the law, but since the law does not expressly permit suicide, it forbids it. If someone breaks the law and harms another voluntarily (that is, an agent who knows whom he is affecting and what he is using), he acts unjustly. Anyone who in anger stabs himself breaks the law and acts unjustly, though not toward himself but toward the state. The suicide who kills himself in anger suffers voluntarily though no one voluntarily suffers injustice. Therefore the state suffers the injustice, and so punishes suicides by a certain loss of civil rights, which presumably means lack of commemoration and perhaps curtailment of the usual rituals, a procedure that Plato also prescribed for cowardly suicides.[93]

Clearly a suicide poses for Aristotle a paradoxical problem that he attempts to resolve in terms of suicide's effects on society. Aristotle, like Plato, condemns only certain kinds of suicide, and here (as opposed to 3.1116a12–15) he narrows the distinction even more to those who commit suicide *dia orgēn*, in anger. But with Aristotle we remain squarely in the realm of social theory, and his testimony supports the suggestion that social significance attached to suicides, and that a distinction between different kinds of suicide existed.

We have examined a variety of ancient sources and can say with a fair amount of certainty that the Greeks recognized a sharp dis-

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[92] Πότερον δ' ἐνδέχεται ἑαυτὸν ἀδικεῖν ἢ οὔ, φανερὸν ἐκ τῶν εἰρήμενων. τὰ μὲν γάρ ἐστι τῶν δικαίων τὰ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου τεταγμένα, οἷον οὐ κελεύει ἀποκτιννύναι ἑαυτὸν ὁ νόμος, ἃ δὲ μὴ κελεύει, ἀπαγορεύει. ἔτι ὅταν παρὰ τὸν νόμον βλάπτῃ μὴ ἀντιβλάπτων ἑκών, ἀδικεῖ, ἑκὼν δὲ ὁ εἰδὼς καὶ ὃν καὶ ᾧ. ὁ δὲ δι' ὀργὴν ἑαυτόν σφάττων ἑκὼν τοῦτο δρᾷ παρὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, ὃ οὐκ ἐᾷ ὁ νόμος. ἀδικεῖ ἄρα. ἀλλὰ τίνα; ἢ τὴν πόλιν, αὐτὸν δ' οὔ ἑκὼν γὰρ πάσχει, ἀδικεῖται δ' οὐδεὶς ἑκὼν. διὸ καὶ ἡ πόλις ζημιοῖ, καί τις ἀτιμία πρόσεστι τῷ ἑαυτὸν διαφθείραντι ὡς τὴν πόλιν ἀδικοῦντι.

[93] One would like to know exactly what *atimia* a suicide victim (or his kin?) may incur. It seems unlikely that Aristotle should be referring here to penalties on children, but rather seems to indicate that cowardly suicides should not be memorialized. Cities, through public pressure rather than written law, may generally have restricted funeral honors to "bad" suicides, and probably families would be relatively willing to be less close to such dead, given the intense ambivalence that the relatives of suicides feel, especially weakly motivated suicides. J. Burnet, ed., *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London 1900) 245, cites Aesch. *Against Ctesiphon* 244 and says, "It is clear from this [the Aeschines passage?] that the *adikia* consisted in bringing blood-guiltiness (*miasma*) on the state, not in depriving the state of a citizen. Hence *atimia* is the appropriate punishment, not damages." However, in context Burnet's conclusion is far from clear, and W.D. Ross' [*Aristotle. Ethica Nicomachea* (Oxford 1915)] translation; namely, loss of civil rights, seems more accurate in that it retains the ambiguity of Aristotle's statement.

tinction between honorable and cowardly suicides, and that very often suicide was a response to such social pressures as the desire for honor, fear of shame, or simply society's demand for one's self-sacrifice for the good of the whole. Conversely, suicide might be condemned absolutely, as the Pythagoreans for example apparently did.[94] Plato's Socrates showed that the Pythagorean stance was too rigid, but clearly many different attitudes to suicide can coexist in any given society. Of course, prescriptive treatments need not be in complete harmony with actual practices or attitudes, but interestingly, the fact that a moral attitude exists, whether the attitude is one of approval or condemnation, may perhaps suggest that suicide was a more or less common occurrence that invited moral discussion.[95]

The aim of this discussion has been to clarify our understanding of the view on suicide in classical Greece. In all cases, a corpse is powerful and dangerous, and in some forms of violent death the implements used acquire additional danger. But the evidence suggests that, though a variety of responses to suicide existed, the importance of shame and honor meant that a distinction between honorable and cowardly suicide was recognized, the first acceptable and even praiseworthy, the second to be condemned. Certainly, this discussion suggests the suitability and desirability of a comprehensive social and ethical framework of suicide, by which we may endeavor to illuminate aspects of tragic suicide. The tragedians constantly examine the conditions of their society, and frequently through the victims of tragic suicide. The Greeks of the fifth century did not in the first instance see themselves as isolated individuals, but individuals struggling for conformity to and acceptance by society. Suicide victims do not for the most part question the validity of social rules. On the contrary, many characters commit suicide precisely to maintain the society they know.

Suicidal figures laden with the unbearable pain of living sketch the most tragic scenario. The tragedians present the most complex picture of an inherently paradoxical phenomenon. Tragedy blurs the subtle but important distinction between willingness to die rather than

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[94] Suicide, according to Plutarch's *Kleomenes* 31 and 37, was absolutely forbidden at Sparta, though, as the story of Pantites indicates, it might still be a more viable alternative to dishonor. For more details, see Hirzel (above, note 1) 55. Conversely, at Keos suicide was an accepted way to end life. See B. Schmidt, *Neues Jahrbuch für dem klassichen Altertum* 11 (1903) 619ff; and Hirzel (above, note 1) 116 and 32, n. 2.

[95] See L. Dublin, *Suicide* (New York 1963) 84.

failure to behave honorably and eagerness to die. Very often tragic suicide victims blame their acts on other people, but more often suicide occurs because of one's sense of shame or an overpowering grief or desire to escape. Suicide can be characterized by a silent, accusatory exit, but also by self-analysis concerning the failure of integration. One of its outstanding characteristics is the extent to which virtually all tragic suicides receive sympathy. Tragic characters frequently feel the push and pull of opposite tendencies, which results in a tension and ambiguity that precipitates self-destruction. The motivations to suicide are external, social. The tragedians delve into and portray them vividly, compelling the audience to question, affirm or negate social standards. Suicide is a social phenomenon, steeped in ethical ramifications, for the dramatists of the fifth century and their audiences, then and now.

APPENDIX A

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SUICIDE

> Our task is to seek the perspectives that give us the broadest and clearest view, to project a model that accounts for the various areas of experience as comprehensively as possible and that is susceptible to frequent factual verification. We cannot hope that our model will be a finished product; it is merely an attempt to set forward for discussion, with full knowledge of its tentative nature.
>
> W. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, p. xx.

The theoretical model presented here owes its inception to the monumental sociological theory of suicide of Emile Durkheim (*Le suicide*) in the late 19th century.[96] "To admit that the ancient Greeks occupy, in certain respects, a unique place in human history, and that they stand in a special relation to our own culture and values, does not imply that they are beyond the reach of comparative theory." So says Sally Humphreys in her *Anthropology and the Greeks*.[97] Many classicists believe that "anthropological studies of primitive thought or of 'shame cultures' give insight into archaic Greek culture but that Greek philosophy and Greek tragedy lie outside the province of the anthropologist, or fall inside it only insofar as 'irrational' elements remain in the culture of the classical period . . .".[98] In fact, tragedy, and suicide in tragedy in particular, provides a fertile field for this sort of approach, since the tragedians and ancient sources outside tragedy treat suicide as a response to social and ethical phenomena in terms of the causes and effects of self-destruction. Durkheim, the French sociologist, began the move from an evolutionist classification of

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[96] For an English translation of Durkheim, see J.A. Spaulding and G. Simpson, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London 1966). For general discussions of Durkheim and his work, see, e.g., T. Parsons, *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, D.L. Sills, ed. Vol. 4 (New York 1968) 311–20; W. Pope, *Durkheim's Suicide: A Classic Analyzed* (Chicago 1976); S. Taylor, *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide* (New York 1982); J. Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology. Vol. 2. The Antinomies of Classical Thought: Marx and Durkheim* (Berkeley 1983). See also Walcot (above, note 1) 233–4, for a succinct discussion of the usefulness of Durkheim's work for understanding ancient attitudes. See also S. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London 1978) 94–106.

[97] 12.

[98] Ibid., 7.

societies to a more abstract concept of social structure. Anthropology proceeded to change from evolutionism to comparative functionalism, while recognizing that abstract concepts of form and relationship apply to both simple and complex societies; as Humphreys remarks, "the aim is not to eliminate differences, but to find a precise way of analysing them. Without similarities difference is meaningless."[99] And, she continues, comparison is only justifiable in terms of a comprehensive theory of social structure.[100]

Because of the inherent difference between the tragedians and Durkheim's purposes, it is dangerous to employ Durkheim's theory too closely. Nevertheless, the monumentality of Durkheim's theory makes it impossible to ignore in any discussion of suicide in Western culture. For this reason, I include here a sustained overview of Durkheim's theory, and cautiously suggest possible categorization of some of the tragic characters.[101] Durkheim's categories were not intended to serve in the analysis of individual cases, but to highlight the conditions that favor suicide, while tragedians show considerable interest in characters' individual complexity. Nonetheless, the social framework allows us to consider the characters in relation to their society, and gives us a theoretical basis from which to proceed.

Durkheim's Theory of Suicide

Durkheim's underlying motive for writing *Le suicide* was to prove that sociology is a scientifically verifiable discipline. Suicide is the empirical subject, but Durkheim uses it to demonstrate a theoretical as well as an empirical fact: the individual actor is necessarily social.[102] The book remains a classic example of the integration of theory and data, though according to sociologists such as Whitney Pope[103] the collected data sometimes failed to prove the theory. Nevertheless, Pope admires Durkheim's work considerably:

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[99] Ibid., 4.

[100] Ibid., 5.

[101] See van Hooff (above, note 1) esp. 79ff, for cogent remarks on the difficulties of using Durkheim, or any modern suicidological theory, for discussing ancient suicide. However, Greek tragic suicide does become more explicable in light of Durkheim's theory, even if we cannot establish an exact correspondonce.

[102] Alexander (above, note 96) 227 and 80.

[103] (Above, note 96) 204.

> Much has changed since *Suicide* was written, and much that was basic to it in 1897 may be rejected without appreciably lowering one's estimation of the book. Final evaluation rests upon a determination of what in *Suicide* is worth emulating. First, this work is theoretical. Durkheim constructed a coherent, powerful, and highly developed explanation, persuasively presented. *Suicide* is also empirical, containing a variety of data. Of particular value is the way in which Durkheim joined theory and fact by systematically interrelating the two. Furthermore, *Suicide* has been widely accepted as the most successful sociological theory to date. . . . In terms of both its influence and its continuing relevance as a model for integrating theory and data, *Suicide* remains a monument.

My purpose is not to decide the success or failure of Durkheim's attempt but rather to extract from it theoretical parameters, still valid in the discipline of sociology, for my study of suicide in Greek tragedy.

Durkheim begins with a definition of suicide: any death that is the direct or indirect result of a positive or negative act accomplished by the victim with full knowledge of its result. A person may use a positive, violent action, or simply abstain from life support. To put it more succinctly, "suicide is always the act of someone who prefers death to life" (277). His definition differs, e.g., from *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*: the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and *intentionally* especially by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind. Durkheim excludes intent because it lacks objectivity: "Intent is too intimate a thing to be more than approximately interpreted by another. It even escapes self-observation" (43). Durkheim considered suicide rates a measure of the health of the social body; by studying suicide, a better understanding of the causes and consequences of the underlying sickness of a society could be achieved. He developed his system in terms of collective sentiments, the moral authority that determines both the degree of cooperative loyalty and the overriding concept of order.

Durkheim's two major explanatory variables, integration and regulation, correspond in general to the Greek notions of *philia* and *dikē*.[104] *Philia* illustrates the nature of social organization, and the relation-

[104] Durkheim's theory claims validity for all societies, and therefore claims to be relevant to any geographical or temporal entity. Whether the Greeks might have understood it, though not important to the theory's value as a tool, is interesting, and the virtual interchangeability of the Greek value terms with Durkheim's terminology adds depth to the applicability of the model.

ships that exist between equals (Theognis 306, Herodotus 7.130, Plato *Symposium* 179c), between family members (Xenophon *Hier.* 3.7, Aristotle *Poetics* 1453b19), between dependents and superiors (Xenophon *Anab.* 1.6.3, Isocrates 16.28), and between states (Thucydides 5.5) or communities (Isocrates 6.11). *Philia* describes, in short, the range of possible associations and the mixture of society, and corresponds closely to Durkheim's discussion of integration. For Durkheim, the strength of collective sentiments determines the degree of social integration. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* notes the multi-faceted aspects of *philia* (8.1159b25ff), and suggests an intimate connection between *philia* and *to dikaion* (8.1155a22–28).[105] *Dikē*, justice, has been defined as the preservation of established order.[106] As the controlling force in society, *dikē* resembles the regulation factor of Durkheim's plan, regulation that determines one's needs and the means to attain them. The abstract nature of Durkheim's social system invites comparison with these Greek social ideas, and although particular social rules may vary according to their geographical and temporal locations, the individual's relationship to society may always create conflict that can end in self-destruction.

Suicide focuses on correlatives, such as the effect of climate on the suicide rate, or racial factors, or psychological explanations, to propose a strictly sociological explanation. For, he says, "at any given moment the moral constitution of society establishes the contingent of voluntary deaths.... The victim's acts which at first seem to express only his personal temperament are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally" (299). Or, "the private experiences usually thought to be the proximate causes of suicide have only the influence borrowed from the victim's moral predisposition, itself an echo of the moral state of society" (300).

His two major explanatory variables, integration and regulation, are determined by the degree of social integration and the controlling force in society. Equally important are Durkheim's further distinctions between types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic—that are understood in their relationship to the overriding

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105 See Nussbaum (above, note 5) 343ff, for a discussion of these concepts in Aristotle.

106 See, e.g., Adkins (above, note 5); Lloyd-Jones (above, note 5); Dover (above, note 1); E.A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978); R. Lamberton, *Hesiod* (New Haven and London 1988).

social structure of regulation and integration. Egoistic suicide represents low integration and excessive individuation; altruistic, high integration and insufficient individuation. Likewise, anomic represents low regulation and insatiable needs while fatalistic results from high regulation and blocked desires. This can be represented graphically:

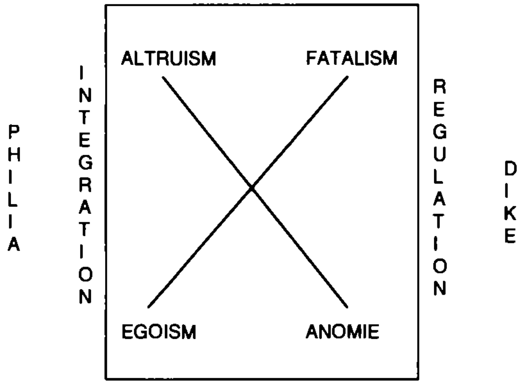

Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that the concepts of integration and regulation create a social environment in which, for the most part, individuals live at an equilibrium between the two forces. This equilibrium is represented by the point at which the two lines intersect. As one moves away from that central point of equilibrium, whether up toward high, or down toward low integration and regulation, then the tendency to suicide increases. The figure also demonstrates the close relationship between altruism and fatalism and between egoism and anomie.

To prove that egoistic suicide and integration vary inversely, Durkheim analyzes three aspects of society: religion, family and politics. By comparisons between different countries and different religions he finds that Protestantism shows a proclivity for egoistic suicide. This, he concludes, must relate to the "spirit of free inquiry that animates this religion" (158). But free inquiry is simply an effect, and the cause of it is the overthrow of traditional beliefs. Reflection occurs when traditional beliefs are no longer efficacious. Until society accepts new traditions, free inquiry multiplies schisms in society. Conversely, Catholicism and Judaism have strict control over details of life and leave little to individual judgement. That is to say, high traditionalism restricts the activity of the individual. Religions that

strictly control their members suppress suicidal tendencies because they provide a social system of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful. This system is traditional and obligatory. The details of dogmas and rites are secondary to their capability of supporting a strong collective life. The Protestant church has less consistency and therefore a less moderating effect upon egoistic suicide. The fifth century witnessed if not an overthrow of traditional beliefs certainly an examination of them,[107] and we will see the repercussions of this phenomenon in the emphasis on and elaboration of egoistic suicides from myth in extant Sophocles and Euripides, and though less obviously, also in the extant Aeschylean corpus.

Durkheim next tackles familial society which he subdivides into conjugal society and the family group proper. He treats the latter as a function of integration and the former in terms of regulation. He attempts to show that the suicide rates of adults vary inversely with the number of people with whom they interact in a familial context.

In the political context, he uses political crises as indicators of changing levels of social integration. He intends to show that the greater the crisis (political upheaval, war, etc.), the greater the *decrease* in suicide. For, he claims, "great social disturbances and great popular wars rouse collective sentiments, stimulate partisan spirit and patriotism, political and national faith, alike, and concentrating activity toward a single end, at least temporarily cause a strong integration of society. . . . As they force men to close ranks and confront the common danger, the individual thinks less of himself and more of the common cause" (208).

He concludes, therefore, that one type of suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of religious, domestic and political society, of which the individual forms a part. "The more weakened the groups to which he belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interests. If we agree to call this state egoism, in which the individual ego asserts itself to excess in the face of the social ego and at its expense, we may call egoistic the special type of suicide springing from excessive individualism" (209). In this state of excessive individualism, physical man opposes social man. "Yet this social man is

[107] We shouldn't underestimate the influence of the Sophists on fifth-century tragedians and thinkers. See, e.g., Dodds (above, note 4) 179–206; W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge 1969); G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981).

the essence of civilized man; he is the masterpiece of existence" (213). Egoistic tendencies in part motivate many tragic suicides, Ajax, Antigone, Jocasta and the would-be suicides, the Danaids and Heracles. All these victims, as we shall see, suffer from a questioning of or weakening of collective, traditional beliefs that leave them with feelings of meaninglessness.

The opposite of low integration/egoistic suicide is high integration/altruistic suicide. "When man has become detached from society, he encounters less resistance to suicide in himself, and he does so likewise when social integration is too strong" (217). Durkheim equates this type of suicide with those primitive societies in which suicide is common. This suicide displays "peculiar characteristics." There are (1) suicides of men on the threshold of old age or stricken with sickness; (2) suicides of women on their husbands' death; (3) suicides of followers or servants on the death of their chiefs. Durkheim asserts that in these cases a person kills himself not because he assumes the right to do so but because it is his duty. Sacrifice is imposed by society for social ends. For society to have this authority, the individual personality is devalued. "For the individual to occupy so little place in collective life he must be almost completely absorbed in the group and the latter, accordingly, very highly integrated" (221). When an altruistic state exists where the ego is blended with something not itself and the goal of conduct is exterior to itself, Durkheim calls the suicide altruistic.

Altruistic suicide is subdivided into three categories: obligatory altruistic, optional altruistic and acute altruistic. The first has already been defined. In the second a person is not explicitly forced to kill himself. However, though society does not demand it, social prestige attaches to the act. In obligatory altruistic suicide, one wants to "escape the stigma of insult." In optional altruistic suicide, the act is done to win esteem. The third category, acute altruistic suicide, occurs when an individual kills himself "purely for the joy of sacrifice, because, even with no particular reason, renunciation in itself is considered praiseworthy" (223). In acute altruistic suicide the individual is moved by "metaphysical and religious systems" that teach that "what reality there is in the individual is foreign to his nature, that the soul which animates him is not his own, and that consequently he has no personal existence" (226). Altruistic suicides in the tragic texts include Antigone, Eurydice, Phaedra, Evadne and Euripides' Jocasta.

Comparing the egoistic suicide with the altruistic, Durkheim finds that "one [i.e., the egoist] is detached from life because, seeing no goal to which he may attach himself, he feels himself useless and purposeless; the other [altruistic] because he has a goal but one outside this life, which henceforth seems merely an obstacle to him" (225). The egoistic suicide has "a feeling of incurable weariness and sad depression." The altruistic suicide's mood "springs from hope; for it depends on the belief in beautiful perspectives beyond this life" (225). The ancient playwrights present the egoistically motivated Ajax, Jocasta and Heracles in this state of weary depression and resignation, and the altruistic Evadne and Eurydice with hopes for integration with loved ones in the world beyond. Furthermore, since altruism disregards everything relating solely to the individual and egoism sets human personality "on so high a pedestal that it can no longer be subordinated to anything," the two types of suicide reflect "all the difference between primitive peoples and the most civilized nations" (227). Yet, we will see both the "primitive" and the "civilized" forces at work in Greek tragedy, creating yet another kind of tension in the plays.

After his discussion on altruistic suicide Durkheim states: "Because altruistic suicide, though showing the familiar suicidal traits, resembles especially in its most vivid manifestations some categories of action which we are used to honoring with our respect and even admiration, people have often refused to consider it as self-destruction" (239). Why, he asks, is it appropriate to call a Jain sectary who kills himself to obtain entry to oblivion a suicide, but not the Canary Island inhabitant who throws himself into an abyss to honor his god? The point for Durkheim is that instances of self-sacrifice have as their root "the same state of altruism which is equally the cause of what might be called heroic suicide" (240). How does one distinguish between motives that are particularly pure and those that "cease to be sufficiently praiseworthy" that are then called suicides? This part of Durkheim's theory is complex, since he classifies even martyrs as suicides because "though they did not kill themselves, they sought death with all their power and behaved so as to make it inevitable. To be suicide, the act from which death must necessarily result need only have been performed by the victim with full knowledge of the facts" (227). Nevertheless, this part of his theory forms an important part of my model. My analyses of Menoeceus, Macaria and Iphigenia demonstrate that they, too, are better analyzed as "noble suicides," as is Alcestis and in part Polyxena.

Durkheim then turns to his second independent variable, regulation. Included in this category are anomic and fatalistic suicide. Anomie is the absence of social norms.[108] Social norms are necessary because human wants are boundless and insatiable, and unless restrained they represent a constant threat to individual happiness. One needs equilibrium between one's needs and the means to attain them, and since man cannot do this himself, external restraint is required. "Man's characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral; that is, social. He is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject to that of society" (252). When this restraint is lacking, anomic suicide results. It differs from other types of suicide in its dependence not on the way in which individuals are attached to society but on how society regulates them (258).

Durkheim arrives at these conclusions after examining the effect on suicidal tendency of economic crises. The popular idea is that suicide increases as poverty does. But Durkheim shows that "fortunate crises, the effect of which is abruptly to enhance a country's prosperity" (243) are also accompanied by an increase in suicide. Therefore, suicide increases in both instances because "they are crises, that is, disturbances of the collective order. Every disturbance of equilibrium, even though it achieves greater comfort and a heightening of general vitality, is an impulse to voluntary death" (246).

A second category scrutinized is divorce. He asserts "in all countries for which we have the necessary data [note that he uses such countries as Prussia, Baden, Saxony, Wurtemberg], suicides of divorced people are immensely more numerous than those of other portions of the population" (262). If marriage is "a regulation of sexual relations, including not merely the physical instincts which this intercourse involves but the feelings of every sort gradually engrafted by civilization on the foundation of physical desire" (270), then divorce represents the "state of conjugal anomy" (273). Though the tragedians treat neither economic crises nor divorce per se, they do address issues of sudden slavery (*Hecuba*), and conjugal unfaithfulness. Deianeira commits an anomic suicide in response to a loss of regulation in her

[108] For an ancient description of anomie, see Thucydides 3.81ff.

life. Ajax, Sophocles' Jocasta, Haemon, Eurydice and Phaedra all exhibit feelings of anomie, as do the Danaids, Heracles and Hermione in their threats.

Durkheim discusses the opposite of anomic suicide, fatalistic suicide, in a single footnote. He simply defines it as "excessive regulation." It applies to "persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline. It is the suicide of very young husbands, of the married woman who is childless" (276 n. 25). Fatalism motivates Polyxena and Haemon, but also in part Macaria and Iphigenia.

Finally, Durkheim acknowledges that these pure and isolated instances do not always occur in experience, but often combine with one another. For example, there is a strong affinity between egoism and anomie (see figure 1 above). "It is, indeed, almost inevitable that the egoist should have some tendency to non-regulation; for, since he is detached from society, it has not sufficient hold upon him to regulate him" (288). Durkheim recognizes the "kindred ties" of egoistic suicide and anomic suicide. "Both spring from society's insufficient presence in individuals. But the sphere of its absence is not the same in both cases. In egoistic suicide it is deficient in truly collective activity, thus depriving the latter of object and meaning. In anomic suicide, society's influence is lacking in the basically individual passions, thus leaving them without a check-rein" (258). Ajax and Jocasta commit suicide and Heracles wishes to commit suicide because of low integration and regulation. Aeschylus' Suppliant Maidens also display this double tendency. Anomie can also be associated with altruism. "One and the same crisis may ruin a person's life, disturb the equilibrium between him and his surroundings, and, at the same time, drive his altruistic disposition to a state which incites him to suicide" (288). Phaedra experiences both forces, as does Eurydice. Even egoism and altruism, though contraries, may contribute to an act. Such, he argues, is the nature of Stoic suicide. The Stoic professes absolute indifference to everything beyond the individual personality, yet he assigns the individual a close dependence on universal reason or, in Durkheimian terminology, on collective sentiments (290). Antigone represents this paradoxical type.

Throughout *Suicide* Durkheim uses polemic against individualistic explanations. The individual in his or her uniqueness is unimportant as a category of analysis, whereas in tragedy the opposite is the case. Despite this difference, the sociological theory enriches our ability to

understand the pressures and motivations of tragic figures. However, Durkheim describes ideal types for his theoretical explanations. Ancient tragedy, and ancient art in general, explores interactions of *ideal* tragic figures with their surroundings. Ajax, Antigone, Phaedra (the list goes on) are tragic figures in part because they are too purely committed to a form of existence that segregates them from the society to which they want to belong. Such individuals do not exist, but rather furnish paradigms in a pure and isolated form. Durkheim created ideal categories of suicide victims to develop his social theory. The tragedians, also concerned with their social reality, developed ideal figures as the foci of social tensions. Both explore this phenomenon, the one theoretically, the other dramatically. The theory enhances the reading of the drama.

CHAPTER TWO

TO ENDURE OR TO DIE HONORABLY

The well-born must live well or die well.
Ajax 479

The emphasis in Greek thought on shame and honor forces many tragic characters to commit suicide to avoid disgrace and restore lost honor. Many of these same characters have the secondary objective of exacting vengeance by their suicide. Deianeira in the *Women of Trachis* kills herself purely out of shame, but Ajax in his name play, Phaedra in the *Hippolytus* and the would-be suicide Heracles in his name play feel the double motivation of avoiding disgrace and exacting punishment simultaneously.

Shame is a potent force in ancient Greek society. In the Homeric epics, warriors feel shame (*aidōs*) at defeat, whether the defeat is a moral failing or a mistake.[1] Where *aretē* is at stake, intentions are insignificant. One *must* feel shame in a society that demands high standards of behavior, because such a society overtly cares about reputation. It makes a difference what other people say. Women also are judged by this standard; the words and judgements of others matter more than what those being judged have actually done. Heroes and heroines alike feel shame not only at failure to uphold society's standard of values but also because they may be mocked and disgraced by society. The result is pain and anger. Many of the Homeric values like competition, fairness, loyalty, *eugeneia* and *timē* persist through the fifth century, and yet few of them persist unchallenged. The tragedies under consideration here maintain some but also challenge traditional values in various ways, and offer a variety of means to work out the pain and anger.

[1] For a general discussion of *aidōs* and examples in Homer, see A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960) 46ff; and B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley 1993) esp. chapter four.

Ajax

Sophocles' *Ajax* provides the most appropriate starting point for a study of suicide triggered by disgrace. His spectacular and moving act of suicide creates a pivotal action in his play, and, interestingly, he describes his suicide with vocabulary reminiscent of sacrifice. Ajax reflects an inverse or negative relationship to his immediate group, and concurrently displays a degree of noncompliance with his at-large society's expectations.[2] His suicide is motivated by intense shame, but he desires revenge simultaneously.[3] Because he clings to traditional values that no longer obtain, he commits suicide, which he supposes will satisfy his need for revenge. Ajax believes his suicide will allow him to avoid mockery, to reconcile himself with the gods and to prove to his father that he was not a coward. Or, in terms of his relationship to society, it will allow him to maintain his honor and overcome his shame, to reintegrate himself into religious society and to be true to his "warrior" ethos. Besides these "positive" reasons for suicide, Ajax also has "negative" motivations, namely, his rejection of his culture's values, which he reveals by his growing and self-imposed isolation from gods and men, coupled with his desire for revenge.

However, when Ajax has finally decided to kill himself, he speaks not in terms of rejecting society but in terms of restoring balance to society. All members of results/shame culture must endure certain restraints. While Ajax was suffering from the *mania*, he could not endure but instead lashed out at those *echthroi* who were in fact *philoi.* He used to endure dreadful situations (650),[4] but because he is no longer able to, he pities his wife and child (652–3). In this third soliloquy, he begins to see events in proper perspective. He realizes that his enemy is Hector, and that gifts of enemies are non-gifts and profitless (665), and he situates himself in a subordinate position to the gods and his leaders, Agamemnon and Menelaus (667–8). Soon he realizes that he does know right reason (*sōphronein* 677), and shows

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[2] For a sustained discussion of the importance of the ethical precept to Help your Friends and Harm your Enemies, see M.W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge 1989) chapter 3.

[3] A.J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (Routledge 1990) 145.

[4] See Williams (above, note 1) 84–5, for other considerations on endurance in the *Ajax.*

it by restating his culture's expectation regarding friends and enemies (679–81). In other words, here Ajax admits what his culture is like, describes what values a member of that culture ought to internalize, and deceives those around him into believing that he can adjust. Though he cannot compromise, his impending suicide suggests that he believes in the continuation of the culture of which he is a part, and his suicide will allow it to survive. However, his suicide is all the more tragic because the culture he dies to ensure is itself in transition and conflict.

Sophocles presents the importance of Ajax's solitude in his decision to kill himself in several ways. His isolation has a double edge: he is isolated not only from his loyal and sympathetic *philoi*, but also from the nonsympathetic larger society represented by Agamemnon, Menelaus and Odysseus. In this, Ajax's suicide is unique among the nonsacrificial suicides of Greek tragedy, for the others either do not have or do not know that they have loyal supporters. Ajax's use of sacrificial language reflects his awareness of his loyal *philoi*, and the isolation from them that his position as victim creates. Ajax's incentives to suicide are clear to himself. In ll. 396ff he acknowledges that he can look to neither gods nor humans for help, because the army, not his friends, will kill him. In ll. 458ff he states his motives explicitly: he is hated by the gods, by the Greek camp, and even by Troy itself. He feels isolated from society.[5] At ll. 589–90 he declares that he owes no service to the gods, a significant component of heroic society. This is an attitude alien to epic values, and suggests instead

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[5] For interpretations that stress the social isolation of Ajax see, e.g., B.M.W. Knox, "The *Ajax* of Sophocles," *HSCP* 65 (1961) 1–37, and *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964); P. Biggs, "The Disease Theme in Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*," *CP* 61 (1966) 223–35; and C.E. Sorum, "Sophocles' *Ajax* in Context," *CW* 79.6 (1986) 361–77. See also F. Jouan, "Ajax, d'Homère à Sophocle," *IL* 39 (1987) 67–73, who traces the development of the depiction of Ajax from the epic cycle to fifth-century tragedy, and who concludes that Sophocles' Ajax is a kind of Don Quixote who inspires respect and admiration but is excluded from the normal processes of a "modern" society.

R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles. An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980) in his implicit general acceptance of suicide as an act of insanity, also assigns Ajax's suicide to insanity. However, Ajax displays motivations which are lacking in maniacal or melancholy suicide. Winnington-Ingram states though, commenting on Tecmessa's words in ll. 264–6, that the theme of social environment "is of the first importance. For Ajax's problem is a social problem, his situation is—or should be—social" (24ff). For other discussions of the madness element see Biggs; M. Simpson, "Sophocles' *Ajax*: His Madness and Transformation," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 88–103; and P. Holt, "Ajax' Ailment," *Ramus* 9 (1980) 22–33.

fifth-century reality.[6] The tableau of Ajax pitifully sitting amidst the slaughtered animals (384–595) presents an Ajax who has challenged the codes of traditional heroic society, for he has attempted to commit murder by treachery.[7] Treachery is characteristic neither of Ajax nor of heroic society, save the sneaky behavior usually associated with Odysseus. Ajax seems to have assumed an Odyssean persona for the one act that backfires, or in social terms, to have attempted to attack society by working within its own parameters. Unfortunately, because Ajax does not possess an Odyssean mentality, he is unable to understand truly the nature of Odysseus' tricks. Odysseus is not inherently wicked, but simply flexible and adaptible as his development in literature generally and in this play specifically proves. Therefore, Sophocles can use Odysseus here to add to epic values the concepts of generosity and pity brought about by one's own experience of the pain of human life.[8]

Ajax's intransigence nurtures his solitude. The chorus of his loyal *philoi* frequently notes his isolation by observations such as "feeding his own mind apart" (614). Ajax himself understands his isolation and he underscores it in his third soliloquy (646ff).[9] The implied background of the play, namely, his alienation from two societies, poignantly reminds us of his isolation, for he reflects the conflict

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[6] See G. Zanker, "Sophocles' *Ajax* and the Heroic Values of the *Iliad*," *CQ* 42 (1992) 22.

[7] For other significant tableaux in the *Ajax*, see O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979) 108–9.

[8] See Zanker (above, note 6) 24–5.

[9] The controversy over Ajax's "deception speech" has spawned a vast amount of literature, for which see H. Friis Johansen, "Sophocles, 1939–1959," *Lustrum* 7 (1962) 94–342, and M. Sicherl, "The Tragic Issue in Sophocles' *Ajax*," *YCS* 25 (1977) 67–98. For a brief review of the issue, see Winnington-Ingram (above, note 5) 46 n. 107. P.T. Stevens, "Ajax in the *Trügrede*," (*CQ* 36 [1986] 327–36) argues that the speech is intended to deceive and that "Ajax' purpose has remained constant, to end his life for the reason he had already given, i.e. the intolerable wound to his pride and the damage to his reputation, which which he lived was irretrievable." On the other hand, Taplin (above, note 7) argues that this speech is neither ironic nor intended to apply to others but not to Ajax. Rather, the speech shows that Ajax "has learned to be 'temperate' by seeing that even he is subject to the changes of time" (130). Taplin concedes, however, that his interpretation of the speech only becomes clear in retrospect to the "shrewd spectator." G. Crane, "Ajax, the Unexpected, and the Deception Speech" (*CPh* 85 [1990] 89–101) goes a step further and states that Ajax, by focusing on time and ignoring the gods, "introduces into the play precisely that anthropocentric attitude which . . . is the cause for Ajax' predicament." See also Knox, "Ajax" (above, note 5) 12–4. If we place this speech in the ethical context, we can see that Ajax realizes he has disrupted the balance of society and must do his part to restore it.

between his understanding of the traditional heroic idea and fifth-century reality.[10] The scene of the actual suicide,[11] its removal from the camp, perhaps most dramatically suggests his utter aloneness. Menelaus and Agamemnon also serve as reminders of Ajax's unique position even after he is dead: at 1067f Menelaus notes that one could not rule Ajax while he was alive, and Agamemnon (1234) reflects that Ajax came to Troy under his own command.

Significantly Sophocles further dramatizes the isolation of Ajax from the gods through the prophecy. The prophetic warning in the *Ajax* (754–79), ostensibly for Ajax, never reaches him. When the messenger arrives with the news that he tells us he must deliver to Ajax himself (733–4), Ajax has taken himself off "to hide his sword" (658). The messenger accordingly relates his message to the chorus, and reiterates it to Tecmessa when she enters. The stage then clears as all go to search for Ajax, leaving it free for Ajax's suicide speech and death. Stated in these bald terms, the prophecy appears to be simply a dramatic device by which Sophocles can clear the stage and change scenes.[12] However, the prophecy is in fact critical in fully understanding Sophocles' version of Ajax's suicide and the reasons for it, and far from being a marginal formal device reveals the artist Sophocles at work, as he invests a dramatic device with a larger sociological meaning: namely, the isolation of Ajax.[13]

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[10] Sorum (above, note 5) discusses this aspect of the play. First, Ajax's very status as a Homeric hero is ambiguous, since a hero simultaneously maintains and threatens the social order. Secondly, warfare in the fifth century was a joint effort, not just a series of individual *aristeiai*. Thus, his story distanced itself from the fifth-century audience, not only chronologically, but also in underlying assumptions.

[11] For discussions concerning the staging of the suicide see e.g., T.B.L. Webster, *Greek Theater Production* (London 1956) 17–8; P. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions* (Oxford 1962) 131–3; W.B. Stanford, ed., *Sophocles' Ajax* (London 1963) 173–4; C.P. Gardiner, "The Staging of the Death of Ajax," *CJ* 75 (1979) 10–4; S.P. Mills, "The Death of Ajax," *CJ* 76 (1980–1) 129–35; M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (Stanford 1987) 192ff.

[12] T. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Berlin 1917) 52–3, argues for this point of view, and J.C. Kamerbeek, "Prophecy and Tragedy," *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965) 29–40, although generally arguing against the idea that tragic oracles are purely formal devices, nevertheless concludes that this prophecy is marginal to the action of the play as a whole.

[13] M. Wigodsky, "The 'Salvation' of Ajax," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 149–58, in response to a general misunderstanding of the prophecy in the *Ajax* attempts to integrate it into the play, and he distinguishes two elements: the warning (754–5) and the actual prophecy (756–79). He points out that the messenger does not end his speech as soon as the warning has been issued (755), but continues to relate at some length the prophecy (756–79), set apart from the warning by the use of ring-composition. The prophecy proper is framed by references to "the day" (*eth' hēmerai* 756~778),

Despite previous discussions of the prophecy, the most pressing question remains. Why does Sophocles have the prophetic warning related to the chorus and Tecmessa instead of to Ajax himself?[14] Even had Ajax heard it along with them, they had no power or authority to deter him from his intended action,[15] nor is there reason to suppose that the Ajax who has in the past spurned divine help would now comply with a divine injunction,[16] notwithstanding his words in the deception speech. The prophecy, like many prophecies in Greek tragedy, shows that there is a larger plan at work,[17] but no

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and hence forms an integral thematic part of the whole play inasmuch as the idea of a time limit to Ajax's dilemma persistently appears in the drama (see also, for example, 117, 131–2, 646, etc.). Wigodsky interprets the prophecy in light of the references to a single day as referring not to the wrath of Athena, which manifests itself in the momentary madness of Ajax, but to her sustained enmity to Ajax in general. Therefore, to say that the wrath of Athena will no longer vex Ajax means simply that Ajax will be dead, and the prophecy means not that Ajax's death can be prevented, but that it cannot and should not (152). Wigodsky argues that references to "safety" by Ajax (691–2) and by the messenger during the prophecy (778–9) verify his suggestion that Ajax sees salvation in death. The Greeks, then, will become his saviors by burying him. The prophecy thus unites the two parts of the play: not only must Ajax die, he must also be buried (157).

The burial issue, rightly pointed out by Wigodsky, is important, but Ajax himself places it in prominence in the play. In his suicide speech (815ff), he addresses his initial request to Zeus, asking that the god allow Teucer to find him first so that his corpse may not be cast out as carrion for birds and dogs (824–31). Again, as in the prophecy, ring-composition delineates these eight lines addressed to Zeus (*O Zeu* 824~831), thereby emphasizing the importance of the issue of burial to Ajax and to the play as a whole. [Taplin (above, note 7) 148, suggests that this speech is a kind of second prologue, because while it is a resolution for the first half of the play, it looks forward to the action of the second half.] The connection between the action of the play and the centrality of the burial surely must have affected the audience more immediately than the more subtle connection provided by references to safety proposed by Wigodsky, and the prophetic warning slips precariously back into a dramatic convenience simply for clearing the stage.

For other problems which arise from Wigodsky's reading see Stanford (above, note 11) 237.

For a review of attempts to deal with the problematical second part of the *Ajax*, see J.F. Davidson, "Sophoclean Dramaturgy and the Ajax Burial Debates," *Ramus* 14 (1985) 16–29.

[14] One might consider a parallel the too-late prophecy in the *Antigone*, but that prophecy relates to the effect of Antigone's death on Thebes, whereas the prophecy in the *Ajax* refers to his individual salvation only.

[15] Knox, "Ajax" (above, note 5) 12.

[16] Ironically, Ajax did accept Athena's help in his failed attack, but we may attribute this to his assumption of a more Odyssean character during the attack.

[17] J. Tyler, "Sophocles' Ajax and Sophoclean Plot Construction," *AJP* 95 (1974) 24–42, argues that Calchas' account attributes Ajax's death to events falling entirely outside of the action of the play, i.e., divine retribution for hybris. The other side of the story, the human motivations, create a play with a double plot, both sides of which result from Ajax's extreme self-confidence.

other prophecy in Greek tragedy remains unrevealed to its subject.[18] For the plays of Sophocles in particular, oracles function to show the distance between human knowledge and divine will.[19] But Society often uses the idea of a divine will to substantiate and validate its human-made rules, and Sophoclean irony thrives on human attempts to overcome human limitations. Ajax disdains divinity, unconcerned with the need to attempt to discover divine purpose. This creates some of the irony in the *Ajax*: despite his scorn of it, divine purpose prevails[20] without his knowledge of it. By keeping the prophecy from Ajax, Sophocles has deftly created another way in which to depict a hero detached from heroic society. Historic or tragic characters may try to defy or resist oracles—one need only think of Mycerinus, Oedipus or Jocasta—but they always at least know what the oracles prophesy. Ajax is far removed from his world, and his suicide is a response to societal pressures of fear of disgrace and desire for revenge.

His isolation results not so much from his megalomaniacal pride,[21] but from his attempt to maintain traditional values that no longer obtain. That is to say, when Ajax, "best after Achilles,"[22] was passed over at the judgement of arms, traditional values broke down because although in a healthy heroic society martial *aretē* takes precedence over all else, here the arms were granted to Odysseus, who represents a society with different values, "in a court's majority verdict" (1243). Yet the play depicts more than a simple breakdown of one type of society because in the person of Ajax it depicts the conflict between heroic and fifth-century reality. Suicide happens at such a critical moment, when one finds oneself in the marginal area in which one set of values replaces another, but neither set of values is

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[18] Herodotus 6.19 provides one instance of an oracle that is given to someone other than the person concerned. While the Argives were consulting the Delphic oracle about the safety of their city a response was given that not only answered their immediate concern but also contained an additional passage about Miletus. Although the Milesians lacked foreknowledge of their predicted doom, it came about nonetheless. J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations* (Berkeley 1978) 169, questions the authenticity of the 'double oracle' because no other Pythian responses address anyone but the consultant. However, H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle I & II* (Oxford 1956) 1.70–1, 94–5, accept it as genuine.

[19] Winnington-Ingram (above, note 5) 181 n. 4.

[20] See Tyler (above, note 17) 23–31, who argues that the human and divine adversaries have different motives and objectives in the play.

[21] Winnington-Ingram (above, note 5) 20.

[22] For a discussion that points out some of the nuances of this statement, see D. O'Higgins, "The Second Best of the Achaeans," *Hermathena* 147 (1989) 43–56.

securely established in society.[23] Ajax's excessive heroic morality both symptomizes a society in decay, and prevents his integration into an emerging but less individualistic society. Ajax finds no solace or meaning in *any* social code, although he clings fiercely to a bygone and disintegrating morality and believes by his suicide to perpetuate that morality. His honor, slighted at the judgement of arms, led him to attempt murder by treachery, and his shame at having failed led him to suicide.

The *Ajax* is the one extant drama in which the actual act of suicide occurs on stage. The two parts of the play cohere because of the action, the first part setting up the motivations of Ajax, the second dealing with the aftermath. The critical moment of the act dramatizes ethical aspects as the suicide ends the heroic chapter and paves the way for a less individualistic reality. Interestingly, Ajax imagines himself in his suicide soliloquy (814ff) as a victim, by that further demarcating his, as any victim's, distance from society. He addresses his sword that he received as a token of guest-friendship from Hector (817) as "sacrificer" (*sphageus* 815), and hence places his death in the context of a warrior's battle.[24] But he also uses his suicide to vent his anger and to exact punishment. He curses the Atreidae hoping that his "self-sacrifice" (*autosphagē* 841)[25] will bring them ruin also. Other suicides also use their self-imposed deaths to punish their "murderers." When Tecmessa finds his body, she refers to him as "newly slain" (*neosphagēs* 898), but when asked by the chorus who had killed him (905) she incisively notes that Ajax was the agent: *autos pros autou. dēlon* (906). Teucer puts Ajax's death into larger perspective. He addresses the sword as "murderer" (*phoneus* 1026), and recognizes that Hector's fortune linked inextricably to Ajax's (1028ff).

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[23] See E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, trans. J.A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (London 1966) 158ff. It is difficult to know whether the play reflects a real crisis of values in Athens or whether Sophocles understood this instinctively, but certainly the tragedians were informed by or susceptible to the influence of the Sophists, who articulated many of the value crises.

[24] See O'Higgins (above, note 22) 52, who argues that Ajax "writes his own death as the completed combat promised and denied him in the *Iliad*."

[25] Ll. 841–2 have been attacked as spurious by some, including D.L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1934) 117. Stanford (above, note 11) following Delcourt and Dain, retains the lines, arguing that this is a malediction, not a prediction. Pearson's *OCT* with which Dawe essentially agrees, on the authority of the Scholia, deletes only *autosphagē . . . ekgonōn*, and this solution appears the best. To the objection that *autosphagē* can only be forced to mean "self-slain" instead of "slain by one's own kindred," (see Fraenkel, *Agamemnon* 1091), one can provide a parallel in Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1316 where Creon refers to Menoeceus as *autosphagē*.

Finally, Teucer acknowledges that this, like all things concerning men, was the gods' contrivance (1036f). This final sentiment effects a typical Sophoclean conclusion. Ironically, and sadly, Ajax, unlike other Sophoclean heroes, never came to this realization of Teucer's. The world presupposed at the opening of the *Ajax* is a society that offers rewards to those who are loyal to friends, society-at-large and the gods. But the movement of the play creates a world that refuses to live by its own standards, and reneges on its promises. This world cannot contain a hero like Ajax whose victimized state resulted from his isolation from society and the gods, from his heightened sense of self-worth.

Ajax's suicide accords with his notion that to live nobly and to die nobly befit the man of noble blood (477–80), and the play never depicts the suicide as cowardly or deserving punishment, since in the end Ajax is buried.[26] In fact, the characters involved in the controversy over Ajax's burial never refer to his suicide at all, nor is there any suggestion that burial is somehow a concession and that burning would have been more typical if Ajax had died in another way. The suicide and the burial harmonize all of the values the play examines: courage, honor, shame, generosity, loyalty, humanity.[27] Of course, tragic figures are always larger than life, and cling to ideals that outstrip reality. Our reaction to Ajax is one of pity and respect, not loathing or fear.[28]

Women of Trachis

The *Ajax* asserts a powerful influence over tragic suicide, and other suicidal characters, including women, maintain the Ajaxian maxim "death before dishonor." Deianeira in the *Women of Trachis* is an informative example. When she decides to commit suicide, she speaks

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[26] L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford 1962) 193–5, discusses succinctly the aftermath of Ajax's suicide. See also Blundell (above, note 2) 90ff.

[27] For the effect on this harmonization of Athena in the prologue, see R. Kilpatrick, "When a God Contrives. Divine Providence in *Alcestis* and *Ajax*," *Dionysius* 10 (1986) 3–20. See also G. Ouellette, "La mort harmonieuse d'Ajax," *Cahiers des Études Anciennes* 21 (1988) 67–74 who argues that the burial also harmonizes all aspects of the universe: Hades, earth and the sun.

[28] See P. Walcot, "Suicide, a Question of Motivation," in *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster I*, edd. J.H. Betts, J.T. Hooker and J.R. Green (Bristol 1986) 235–6, for some brief but incisive comments on the suicide of Ajax.

of the importance of nobility and reputation, more like an Ajax than a woman typically concerned only with her private world.

In Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, an ominous silence accompanies Deianeira's final exit to suicide. Silence is a powerful dramatic weapon, and often a telling factor in personality determination. Cassandra's extended silence in the *Agamemnon* frustrates, angers, terrifies and befuddles Clytemnestra and the chorus until her horrifying scream shatters the silence and presages the murderous acts to come.[29] In the *Hecuba*, Hecuba lies on the ground under the crushing weight of her sorrows, unnoticed by characters and audience alike until Talthybius and the chorus call attention to her. The impact of her silent presence chills the audience. Exits can be equally compelling. In the *Trojan Women*, Andromache's removal from Hecuba's presence to the Greek camp fills us with foreboding for Astyanax left behind. In the *Agamemnon*, the King's final, slow exit along the purple carpet while Clytemnestra reassures him of his household position[30] directs attention to the significance of the action and its multifaceted aspects: Agamemnon's guilt and his ethos, the victory of Clytemnestra and the religious and political overtones. Unusually for Greek theater he exits in silence, without final comment.[31]

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[29] Oliver Taplin, "Aeschylean Silences and Silences in Aeschylus," *HSCP* 76 (1972) 57–97, defines a "true Aeschylean silence" as the object of direct dramatic attention while it is in progress.

[30] Ibid., 78.

[31] On entries and exits in general, Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 10, concludes ". . . whatever is said and done at the actual time of the event is of vital importance since attention is then directly concentrated on it; also what transpires after it may reflect back on it, and to some extent change its meaning in retrospect. But to a large degree the significance of an entry or exit depends on what has passed before it, on the preparation for it. It is the preparation which creates expectations and which puts the event into its dramatic context, and hence gives it work to do in the play."

In three Sophoclean plays, *Women of Trachis*, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, an ominous silence accompanies a final exit which leads to a suicide. Deianeira, Jocasta and Eurydice all leave the stage after having heard a detailed account of dreadful acts, to which they may or may not have been a party. In each instance, attention is focused on the silent departure. F.L. Shisler ("The Use of Stage Business to Portray Emotion in Greek Tragedy," *AJP* 66 [1945] 377–97) suggests: "It is not the manner of exit,—though that is usually hasty, often silent,—but the exit itself, the fact of unexpected departure, that shows emotion. Thus Eurydice . . . in *Ant.* 1244 suddenly leaves when she has heard the grievous news of the messenger. Jocasta's distress and shame are revealed as she leaves Oedipus's presence (*OT* 1072). Deianeira slips away in sorrow and remorse at the news of the dreadful effect of her love charm (*Tr.* 813)."

See also K. Reinhardt, *Sophocles*, trans. H. Harvey and D. Harvey (Oxford 1979) 244 n. 17, for a discussion of the possible chronological development of the motif.

Deianeira leaves the stage quietly after having heard a detailed account of dreadful acts to which she unwittingly was a party. The silent exit of Deianeira is just one instance of silence in a play of silences, secrecy and revelation. Most suggestively, Deianeira commits suicide in silence, away, she thinks, from onlookers. This one act of hers taken all alone and without approval, disapproval, consent or suggestion from anyone, ends disastrously. Her motivations are understandable: fear of shame and uncertainty because her accustomed role as wife of Heracles has disintegrated.[32] By portraying her as a woman given to silence and secrecy and by portraying her suicide as silent and secret, Sophocles shows the essential ambiguity of her character: suicide is not the resolute action expected from Deianeira, but its execution is very consistent with her character as developed. Silence and secrecy function in the play to suppress, mask and falsify information or motivations, and Sophocles uses the motifs in a variety of ways to allow Deianeira's character to emerge. Though revelation does come, it comes too late.[33] The silence, secrecy and revelation themes manifest themselves in many ways, but two aspects are most interesting: first, of the main characters, only Hyllus and the messenger are willing to reveal everything they know at any time. No one else in the play will speak openly until forced. Secondly, the connections (or lack thereof) between Heracles and Deianeira, especially concerning the oracle, the robe, Iole, Nessus' poison and the exit of Deianeira and her death that are complemented by the entrance of Heracles and his impending death, are veiled in silence and secrecy imagery. Most telling is the suicide of Deianeira, which though it takes place in silence and secrecy, nonetheless reveals much about Deianeira and her response to societal rules and regulations.

The reticence of main characters becomes evident from the very beginning of the play and is crucial to an understanding both of the emerging characterization of Deianeira, and the general problem of communication, which is arguably a main theme of the play. In each instance the reticent party is persuaded to talk because in part his or her information is necessary for the development of the story, in part because Sophocles makes Deianeira stand alone and isolated. She

[32] Van Hooff (above, note 3) 115–6, points out that her suicide is of the *pudor* (shame) rather than *mala conscientia* (guilt) type because she only kills herself after somebody blames her.

[33] For a discussion of the importance of the theme "learning too late," see C.H. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951) 103–21.

alone of the main characters at a critical moment in the play is not persuaded to talk and so, as far as the chorus can ascertain, stands properly accused of deception and evil actions.

There are several instances of this reluctance to communicate. For example, after the nurse instructs Deianeira and spurs her to action,[34] Deianeira reproaches Hyllus for his failure to ask after his father who has been gone for so long (65–6). Now she reveals to him that she possesses an oracle that Heracles had given to her long before, which she has kept in secrecy.[35] Hyllus, surprised, reminds her that he knew nothing about it (77).

A messenger arrives with the happy news of Heracles' recent victory. The reprieve, however, proves short-lived, for soon after Lichas arrives with the captives, and the "deception of Deianeira"[36] commences. During the ensuing conversation, Lichas remains silent about the most important and most destructive information, the identity of Iole, convincing Deianeira that Iole is simply one among the captives with no privileged position. After Lichas' long rhesis detailing Heracles' latest exploits, the chorus[37] ironically remarks on the queen's delight at present events and future promises (291–2). The irony lies in what she *did not* hear, i.e., why Heracles was so bent on the destruction of Eurytus. At the moment Lichas and the captives are

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[34] Deianeira accepts her advice because she is malleable, a receptacle for suggestions of others, even slaves. P.E. Easterling, *Sophocles Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982) 84 and passim, argues for a "firm and dignified" Deianeira. This reading is unconvincing since Deianeira continually mentions her "fear," and constantly needs direction, or at least approval. Cf. M. McCall, "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Structure, Focus and Heracles," *AJP* 93 (1972) 142–63; G.H. Gellie, *Sophocles: A Reading* (Melbourne 1972) 53ff; R.W.B Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980) 41–3; and Winnington-Ingram (above, note 5) 78.

[35] There are two oracles in this play, one which Deianeira does know about (the one from the Selloi), and one which she does not know about (the oracle from Zeus that predicted that Heracles would be killed by someone already dead). For remarks on the important oracle theme see Whitman (above, note 33) 108; Gellie (above, note 34) 69ff; Burton (above, note 34) 66–7; and B. Heiden, *Tragic Rhetoric: An Interpretation of Sophocles' Trachiniae* (New York 1989), who argues that Deianeira may not be recounting the prophecy just as she heard it and instead adds the possibility of Heracles' death (45–6) [certainly Deianeira does have this tendency as is shown by her opening sentiments: call no one happy until he is dead, but my life is completely wretched], and that Heracles attempts to confirm the first oracle's truth by showing its correspondence with the second prophecy (144–8).

[36] Easterling (above, note 34) 107. For a discussion of Sophocles' use of the lying Lichas, see M.R. Halleran, "Lichas' Lies and Sophoclean Innovation," *GRBS* 27 (1986) 239–47.

[37] For a recent discussion of the chorus in the *Trachiniae*, see C.P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus. A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City 1987) 119–38. She rightly

dismissed, the messenger checks Deianeira's departure and urges her to action (337ff).[38] It is only after the messenger confronts Lichas and after Deianeira assures him that she has always tolerated Heracles' promiscuity that the reticent Lichas speaks. Deianeira persuades Lichas to cast aside his silence, although she has led her life silently and secretly. Once she possesses all the information, she takes steps, each of which she does in secret, which lead inevitably to Heracles' destruction and her self-destruction.

Deianeira's nurse also suffers from tendencies to reticence. After she discovers Deianeira's body, her cry of grief in the house interrupts the chorus in its musings about Aphrodite (860–1). The nurse's initial disclosure of Deianeira's suicide assumes the form of a lament[39] and prepares the way for the nurse's detailed description of the suicide. The passage also expands the theme of silence: when one is inherently or deliberately reticent, information must be extracted, bit by bit. Throughout the *Women of Trachis* characters do not speak clearly until compelled. Deianeira kept several secrets, Lichas too. Now the nurse is reluctant, or unable, to speak directly.[40] Only when her horror gives way to pity (897) does she relate how her mistress killed herself.

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points out how its independent social position has a direct bearing on its relations with Deianeira (121), but she overstates the case for "an absence of intimacy" between the chorus and Deianeira (123 and passim). In fact, at several critical points in the play the chorus empathizes very intimately with Deianeira, for example, after Lichas' scene the chorus joins in condemning a man "who practices a secret, degrading villainy" (383–4). It, like Deianeira, lays strongest emphasis on secrecy, and thereby suggests firmly its sympathy for her. Or even more suggestively after her suicide when the chorus sings of escape and then fades into obscurity as Deianeira does, for discussion of which see my chapter three.

[38] Reinhardt (above, note 31) 41, calls the ensuing action "the first revelation scene in Sophocles, or perhaps in all literature."

[39] M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974) 131ff; and Burton (above, note 34) 77.

[40] Her language is sometimes difficult. For example, the phrase "from an unmoved foot" has defied interpretation. R.C. Jebb, *Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments. Part V. The Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1892) ad loc., says "This is one of those proverb-like turns which a homey speaker would use in the desire to be impressive." J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. III. The Trachiniae* (Leiden 1959), ad loc., says it is "a popular periphrasis for dying." Easterling, ad loc., claims that "it probably did not sound as frigid to its first audience as it does to a modern ear. The Greeks like paradoxical statements and used 'foot' in many contexts where it seems incongruous to us." N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass. 1987) 20, suggests that we are to know now that Deianeira had not hung herself because an "unmoved foot" refers to someone stationary, like a hoplite, rather than someone swinging in the air.

The *Women of Trachis* is also a play of deception.[41] The deception that entangles Deianeira results, in some sense, from a lack of communication with Heracles. Heracles and Deianeira never meet.[42] The dramatic necessity of their separation becomes very significant, because husband and wife react differently to the same external stimuli.[43] Deianeira has led a fearful life of inaction, and when she finally moves to action, she plans and performs incorrectly. Her world is the opposite of Heracles'. Hers is the world of female society, of civilization, made possible by Heracles' participation in the world of bestiality and wantonness.[44] This separation is created and paradoxically reinforced by the oracles, the robe, Iole, Nessus' poison and the silent exit/entrance motif, because each of these elements plays a significant yet different role in husband's and wife's lives. In a play teeming with secrecy or silence imagery, the dramatic significance of each important element heightens further because of the ambiguity surrounding it.

Iole is a telling case-in-point. The captives stand by silently during the exchange of Lichas and Deianeira, but Deianeira sympathetically addresses one who has caught her attention because of her obvious nobility, and asks her identity.[45] Since Iole remains mute, Deianeira directs her questions to Lichas who immediately becomes uncomfortable. He prevaricates, claiming to know nothing about the captives because, he insists, "I performed my task in silence" (319). Again Deianeira in vain presses Iole to speak, but Lichas states her case with finality, pointing out that she has not spoken at all and is un-

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[41] For a brief discussion of this aspect of the play, see Ruth Scodel, *Sophocles* (Boston 1984) 27ff.

[42] See McCall (above, note 34) for a discussion of the distribution of roles in the play.

[43] Gellie (above, note 34) 78, emphasizes the extreme male/female conflict: "Heracles and Deianeira are utterly admirable, even ideal within their sealed compartments, but when the seals are broken and an understanding relationship is called for, the danger of their maladjustment becomes evident."

[44] C.P. Segal, "Mariage et sacrifice dans les *Trachiniennes* de Sophocle," *AC* 44 (1975) 30–53, overemphasizes the bestiality of Heracles, who is not so much a beast as a controller of beasts. In order to tame the savage world, though, he must be in it. Therefore, the contrast between Deianeira's world and Heracles' is valid. For a reading which casts Heracles as the single hero (as opposed to a shared central focus on Deianeira and Heracles), see McCall (above, note 34); and C. Fuqua, "Heroism, Heracles, and the 'Trachiniae'," *Traditio* 36 (1980) 1–81.

[45] On the meeting between Deianeira and Iole, see A. Beck, "Der Empfang Ioles. Zur Technik und Menschengestaltung im ersten Teile der *Trachinierinnen*," *Hermes* 81 (1953) 10–21; and B.X. de Wet, "An Evaluation of the *Trachiniae* of Sophokles," *Dioniso* 54 (1983/5) 213–26.

likely to speak now, for she suffers from loss of her fatherland (322–8).

Pressing misfortune has silenced Iole; misconceived loyalty has silenced Lichas, and Sophocles uses the characters to contrast with Deianeira's passive reticence. Yet, because of the messenger's insistence, the truth about Iole becomes manifest, and the significance of *secrecy* in characterization begins to emerge more clearly. Heracles determined to destroy Oechalia because he could not persuade Eurytus to give him his daughter for his "secret bed" (360). The messenger's detailed disclosure confuses Deianeira: she finds she has unwittingly welcomed a secret enemy (376) into her house. Heracles' calculated act of secrecy concerning Iole puts Deianeira's innocent, yet ultimately deadly, trust in him into sharp relief. Her inherent natural altruistic pity has led her to an unenviable position as betrayed host. Significantly, both Heracles and Deianeira react strongly to Iole, but each does so in a way that widens the gap between them.

Deianeira experiences a change from sympathetic acceptance of Iole to insecure rejection of the situation. Characteristically, she comes to the chorus for support but she comes "unobserved" (533). During this speech she reveals the gift she received from Nessus that she has kept for some years now hidden in a copper urn (555). Just as Heracles kept hidden the words of the second oracle concerning his murderer, Deianeira has unknowingly kept hidden the catalyst, namely, the poison, to the fulfillment of it. She presents the anointed robe to Lichas, concealed in a chest, and warns him that it must remain so until Heracles dons it. The robe serves to connect the world of Deianeira with that of Heracles,[46] and yet its dramatic significance increases by its concealment.

Deianeira soon realizes that her intended deception of Heracles is in fact her deception and his destruction. She takes the next fatal step: it is not possible for one who wishes not to be evil to live when she hears others speaking ill about her (721–2). This is the sentiment of *Ajax* 479, and is "the essence of heroic ethics."[47] As Deianeira moves closer to an unaccustomed sphere of resolute action, she articulates the public notions of nobility and reputation, instead of her private concerns.[48]

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[46] For a more detailed analysis of the robe, see Segal (above, note 44).

[47] Kamerbeek, *Trachiniae* (above, note 40) 161.

[48] Gellie (above, note 34) 67, states "It sounds more like the reason of a shame-conscious Homeric warrior than of this woman who has appeared to lack any self-regarding instincts."

The chorus attempts to dissuade her from her dark thoughts, and when Hyllus arrives it advises her to be silent (731), to be true to her nature, to live as before in silence. Deianeira takes no heed and presses Hyllus for information, and a tension arises from her uncharacteristic pursuit of information. Regarding the oracle, she had asked nothing. Regarding Iole, her questions remained unanswered. Regarding the ointment of Nessus, she had too readily accepted it as beneficial. She gradually assumes a more active role, though not a resolute one, and by so doing has become enmeshed in the deception. Now she seems to want release from her fears about her gift to Heracles, but a release is impossible. Hyllus, responding to the questions vividly and accusingly, ends his description of Heracles' plight with a curse on his mother because she has killed his father.

Deianeira exits, in silence. Her foray into the world of action has ended catastrophically, but the chorus does not understand her silent exit: "Why do you creep off silently? Do you not see that by your silence you join your accuser in accusing yourself?" (813–4). Earlier in the play the chorus might certainly have spurred Deianeira to her defence by these words. Now she is beyond such a suggestion, now she makes no response, for she has retreated into her customary world of silence and secrecy. By her silence she accepts her guilty part in Heracles' death, innocent though her intentions may have been. For an *agathos* intentions are insignificant in considering one's shame at failure.

Deianeira's silent exit sets the stage for Heracles' silent entrance, which confuses the chorus, for they are uncertain whether his silence shows he is dead or only asleep (968–70).[49] By an impressive stroke Sophocles thus creates another connection between Deianeira and Heracles that paradoxically highlights their separation, simultaneously reminding us of the importance of silence to the play.

As Hyllus tells his father of Deianeira's death and her error in believing Nessus,[50] Heracles comes to realize the import of his son's words, and recognizes and reveals the second prophecy that he has

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[49] For a discussion of the structure of the play, see R.L. Kane, "The Structure of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: 'Diptych' or 'Trilogy'?" *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 198–211.

[50] Hyllus is well-suited to assume the role of defender of Deianiera. See G.M. Kirkwood, "The Dramatic Unity of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *TAPA* 72 (1941) esp. 203; and Gellie (above, note 34) 73. However, this role is short-lived for Hyllus, and after 1142 Hyllus makes only one reference to Deianeira (1233), though even there the focus is on Iole, not Deianeira. As McCall (above, note 34) 161, states, ". . . again Deianeira becomes irrelevant once Heracles is content." See also T.F. Hoey, "The *Trachiniae* and Unity of Hero," *Arethusa* 3 (1970) 1–22, esp. 14–6.

known secretly for some time (1149–50). This oracle, never made known to Deianeira though she possessed the means to its fulfillment, takes a central place in the remainder of the play. Deianeira, like the chorus, drops out of consideration and the focus stays on Heracles.[51]

Meanwhile between Deianeira's silent exit and Heracles' silent entrance, the chorus sings the third stasimon, which resonates with horror and pity, but in which the "main emphasis is on knowledge, expressed through the themes of seeing and revelation (821–30, 842–50, 860–1)."[52] The juxtaposition of the ode with Deianeira's final exit effectively and ironically underlines her silence. The chorus' final insight of the ode that the silent Aphrodite is the visible executor of the action (860–1) recalls the first stasimon where Cypris was invoked as an umpire (515–6). The theme of love is important throughout the play, but the addition of the paradoxical "silent revelation" underscores the significance of secrecy. The emphasis on silence at this point of choral reflection effectively caps the ominous silence of Deianeira and anticipates the equally ominous silence of Heracles. In addition, this ode shows that Eros plays a significant role in the play.

Both husband and wife are ruled by Eros, as indeed is everyone (441–6),[53] but each experience it in different ways. Heracles exemplifies unrestrained subservience to eros, and in Greek art and literature he exists outside the norms. Lusty and untamed, what he wants he takes, despite law or decorum. His eros is active. Deianeira has expressed her eros in quietly waiting for her husband to return. It is a passive eros. She has also been the object of eros,[54] coming from Heracles, from Nessus, from the river god Achelous. Her self-definition has

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[51] Kamerbeek, *Trachiniae* (above, note 40) 21–4, has an interesting discussion of Heracles' scene, and how Heracles' lack of concern with Deianeira whether alive or dead means a deepening of Deianeira's tragedy. Further, after Heracles comes to realize the meaning of the oracle, he ceases to lament. "Awareness of his real condition restores the hero to his true nature" (23). For other discussions of the "heroism" of Heracles, see H. Friis Johansen, "Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*," *C&M* 37 (1986) 47–61; and J.D. Mikalson, "Zeus the Father and Heracles the Son in Tragedy," *TAPA* 116 (1986) 89–98.

[52] Easterling (above, note 34) 174. See also Burton (above, note 34) 65ff.

[53] For the theme of Eros as a sickness, see Biggs (above, note 5) 223–35. For an extended discussion of Deianeira's whole speech (439–69), see D.A. Hester, "Deianeira's 'Deception Speech'," *Antichthon* 14 (1980) 1–8.

[54] For a discussion of sexual imagery in the play see D. Wender, "The Will of the Beast: Sexual Imagery in the *Trachiniae*," *Ramus* 3 (1974) 1–17.

hinged on being the object of eros, and when she feels in danger of losing this status she makes her disastrous decision.[55] The thought of sharing her bed with youthful Iole seems odious to Deianeira, who describes her own bloom as fading (545–51). The institution of marriage regulates Deianeira's eros, which is particular: it exists only for Heracles, now, in the past and in the future. When her marriage and all the social regulations inherent in the institution of marriage totter, she lapses into an anomic state. By sending Iole home, Heracles has helped to create this state for Deianeira whom the disruption overwhelms. Therefore, compelled to take action, she acts out of character because she acts on her own volition. Her life has been strictly regulated, first by her father, then by Heracles. Now she must take control to ensure her continued safety under the control of her husband. This paradox she cannot understand; it leads to her suicide:[56] "May I never understand nor learn bold evils; I hate bold women" (582–3). She feels uncomfortable in the world of action, and in fear of disgrace she bids the chorus to be discreet. "In darkness one may be ashamed of what one does, without the shame of disgrace" (596–7). Tragically, she does become bold and hateful, not only to herself, but also, she fears, to society (721–2). Just as her life in Trachis began by an uprooting because of Heracles (39),[57] so, too, now as she ends her life, she finds herself with no foundation and with no hope (726) that affairs can be set aright. In her desperate attempt to retain her position as spouse of the *oikos*, she oversteps societal limits and so fears the shame that results from failure. Hyllus reinforces her shame by exposing her treachery publicly, accusing her, cursing her and promising that Justice and the Fury will punish her (808–9). Deianeira silently acquiesces, and the chorus remarks, "Surely you see that by silence you join your accuser and accuse yourself?" (813–4). Though popular ethics imply that silence is a woman's best friend, here ironically, silence becomes the indictment.

When the nurse returns from the scene of the suicide, she reveals the suicide in a lyric exchange (871–95) with the chorus. When she

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[55] See, e.g., G.M. Kirkwood, *A Study in Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 114, and Kamerbeek, *Trachiniae* (above, note 40) 25: "Her existence is entirely dependent on Heracles'."

[56] Gardiner (above, note 37) 129, argues that even in her resolution of death she is "only doing as others bid her."

[57] Iole is also referred to as "uprooted" (240), and the repetition underlines the similarity of Iole's and Deianeira's situations. See R.G.A. Buxton, *Sophocles* (Oxford 1984) 9.

describes the weapon, the sword (886), the chorus depicts it as a *hybris* (888), suggesting that for a woman, or at least, this woman, to use a sword against herself is out of character and therefore a crime against her *aretē* and the restraints of society. Furthermore, after some 30 lines of lyric exchange with the nurse in which it questions her over and over, even after the nurse's clear "she herself by herself" (891), the incredulous chorus finally characterizes Deianeira's suicide as daring (898).[58] Earlier Deianeira, in error, had alluded to Heracles as "not daring." Now she, though unequipped, has become daring, and the audience, like the chorus and the nurse (896–7), pities her for her misconceived boldness. Only Heracles remains unmoved by pity, for when the truth of her gift comes to light he becomes focused only on himself, his predicted self-immolation.

The social units of family and friends, represented in this play by Hyllus and the chorus, condemn her actions, cast her out in the one case explicitly, in the other implicitly, and Deianeira no longer recognizes her place among them. She therefore condemns and isolates herself by the very means prescribed by her culture, silence, by which she has lived her life. The nurse's narrative description emphasizes the solitude into which Deianeira has retreated, and Deianeira's suicide suits her secretive nature. She goes into the house alone (900), and after running from room to room, touching mementoes and weeping and refusing to speak to anyone but calling instead on inanimate objects in her farewell to life (904–11), she withdraws into the innermost, private area of the house, the *thalamos* (913). She directs her very final words to her bed, the emblem of her self-definition,

> O my bed and my bridal chamber, farewell
> now forever, for never again will you take me
> as wife between these sheets (920–2).

Deianeira then proceeds to unfasten her gown, uncover her whole side and stab herself (923–31). Winnington-Ingram correctly asserts: "for a woman to strip herself half-naked on the marriage-bed—as she had often stripped herself for Heracles—and stab herself in the belly is very suggestive indeed."[59] The sword, with its obvious phallic and masculine connotations as the weapon of war, underlines the

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[58] For a detailed discussion of the kommos, see J. Bollack, "Meurtre et suicide: De l'emploi d'une métaphore guerrière. Le Kommos des Trachiniennes (vers 874–897)," in *Studi di onore A. Barigazzi* I (1986) 83–91.

[59] (Above, note 5) 81 n. 28. He, however, incorrectly states that hanging oneself

uncertainty Deianeira finds herself in as she steps out of her feminine character and into a masculine one. On the other hand, to play her suicide in the context of a sexual encounter with Heracles suggests that Deianeira in her suicide reaffirms the place of marriage in society, the regulations that she overstepped by trying to dictate Heracles' actions and the particular type of marriage that Greek society sanctioned.[60] By her very private act, she underscores the very public importance of socially-imposed restrictions.[61]

Deianeira, the unwitting killer of her husband, the unwitting catalyst to the accomplishment of the oracle, becomes the resolute suicide for fear of disgrace. This societal pressure, i.e., the need for approval and acceptance that if absent produces shame and disgrace, and the chorus' dual role as confidante to Deianeira and continual reminder of Heracles,[62] show that the suicide is not simply a private affair but also involves society and causes repercussions for household and country alike.[63] In her aftermath speech, the nurse begins to broaden the scope of Deianeira's suicide by focusing on Hyllus' reaction to it (931ff). The play then depicts society's reaction to it through the choral response and through Heracles' response. Eventually the suicidal act itself is subsumed in Heracles' story when he, the Panhellenic protector, takes the stage, and Deianeira fades into the background, as the chorus does. Hyllus will mention once more

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is not sexually suggestive. See also Wender (above, note 54) 13; and B. Seidensticker, "Die Wahl des Todes bei Sophokles," in *Sophocles. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* XXIX (Geneva 1982) 114, who suggests that Deianeira uses Heracles' sword because she is bent on self-punishment.

[60] For details on marriage and concubinage, see W.K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca 1968) 113ff; D.M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (Ithaca 1978) 87ff; and M.R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (Baltimore 1986) 64ff.

[61] Heiden (above, note 35) 130, states this in slightly different terms: "Her suicide does not destroy this world so much as protect it from change . . ."

It might be objected that the view of Deianeira's suicide presented here is too exhibitionist, and that if a woman genuinely wanted to make her final action an underscoring of the importance of socially-imposed restrictions, she would be much more modest in her suicide, as e.g., Polyxena is at the moment of her death. However, Polyxena is a virgin, while Deianeira is a matron. Furthermore, although Deianeira will be found, her character has not been developed in such a way to make us believe that she has calculated anything beyond the immediate goal of dying. She doesn't curse anyone, as do Eurydice in the *Antigone* or Ajax in his play, which implies to me that just as she acted impetuously in sending the anointed robe to Heracles, so she acts impetuously here with little forethought about the repercussions. Furthermore, in a shame-culture, suicide must be public to correct public opinion.

[62] See Gardiner (above, note 37) 129ff.

[63] Ibid., 134.

the suicide in the exact words used by the nurse ("she herself by herself" 981~1132), by that underlining the horror, surprise and pity surrounding the act. Though her silence was her apparent accuser, her suicide not only vindicates and restores her in the eyes of society, but also allows her culture to survive.

Hippolytus

Phaedra furnishes the clearest example of a suicide brought about because of fear of disgrace but simultaneously carried out to ensure that vengeance will be wrought. She does not leave vengeance up to the gods by uttering a curse, but instead leaves a devastatingly accusatory written suicide note. The suicide note of Phaedra provides a critical piece of evidence for an interpretation of her death. Phaedra is, like Antigone and Alcestis, a "double" suicide. At the opening of the play she is near death because she has abstained from food for several days. This process has taken place in private, and the cause of Phaedra's dying has remained hidden as the chorus shows in the first stasimon. In private contemplation, she felt the possibility of the loss of her good reputation. In order for her good reputation to be restored, she believes, her nobility must be witnessed and her potential slanderer disgraced. Paradoxically a private suicide by starvation would fail to accomplish this because the withdrawal from food symbolizes withdrawal from interaction and hence precludes recognition.[64] And so she emerges into public. When the nurse finally discovers the reason for her passion, Phaedra is able to make public the pressures she has felt internally, and her society's reaction to them validates her own sense of shame. Her suicide note records her reaction to this external and condemnatory reality. In retaliation, she condemns Hippolytus. She has eavesdropped on Hippolytus' speech of hatred against women (616–68),[65] and the sentiments he expresses therein lead Phaedra to believe that he is an enemy. According to the ethical precept of help your friends and harm your enemies,

[64] B.E. Goff, *The Noose of Words. Readings of Desire, Violence and Languages in Euripides' Hippolytos*, (Cambridge 1990) 5.

[65] Taplin (above, note 7) 70–1, points out that this "sustained scene of eavesdropping, with its almost grotesque associations with listening at the keyhole, is quite without parallel in surviving Greek tragedy." Cf. also W.D. Smith, "Staging in the Central Scene of the *Hippolytus*," *TAPA* 91 (1960) 162–77, and D.J. Mastronarde,

Phaedra now must treat him as an enemy in order to save her reputation. Resolving therefore to die, she addresses two issues of concern to her: reputation and revenge.[66] Her quest for revenge results from a desperate wish to involve Hippolytus in her passion and a need to teach him moderation (731),[67] as well as from her misguided belief that by her suicide she can acquire an almost magical control over him, a power and advantage she could not wield while alive.[68] She wishes to exercise her power by punishing Hippolytus, and by indicating his guilt, to reduce her personal guilt. The *deltos*, the wooden tablet, magically assumes the character of the chaste Phaedra, a characteristic lost to her as long as she lived with her guilty passion, and becomes a lifeless but effective (though brief) condemner of the living in a way that the sentient Phaedra could not achieve.[69] The suicide note encapsulates Phaedra's trial, her struggle between emotion and intellect.[70] Her intellect, i.e., her concern for the moral standards of society, *sōphrosynē*, *eukleia* and *aidōs*, terms roughly translatable as temperance, good repute and shame, forced her to suppress her passion,[71] but in the end, her passion prevails in the revenge perpetrated by the note.

Contact and Discontinuity. Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic State. UC Classical Studies 21 (1979) 81.

[66] For a discussion of the tendency to emphasize one aspect of Phaedra's motivations to the exclusion of the other, see D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme, and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 41, and n. 19 for a fuller bibliography.

[67] For a discussion of how the term *sōphrosynē* is used in the play to illuminate the problems between desire and speech see Goff (above, note 64) 39ff.

[68] It would be interesting to study suicide in Greek tragedy in light of Greek magic. For one example of a sociological discussion of suicide as a magical act, see C.W. Wahl, "Suicide as a Magical Act," in *Clues to Suicide*, edd. E.S. Shneidman and N.L. Farberow (New York 1957) 23–8.

[69] F. Zeitlin, "The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the *Hippolytus*," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian (Durham 1985) 76–7 and 93, interprets the *deltos* as a concrete sign of the pervasive conflict in the play between inside and outside, which inevitably results from a secret adulterous desire. Goff (above, note 64) 101, notes that the letter combines the powers of speech and silence, and appears to be a revelation but functions as a means of concealment. "It combines Phaidra's power as author and source of persuasion with the inherent female powerlessness that initially makes the rape believable."

[70] Conacher (above, note 66) 32, calls Phaedra's agon "one of Euripides' most successful dramatizations of the conflict between passion and intellect." T.B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 76, suggests that an essential difference between Euripides' first and second *Hippolytus* is that he had become "more interested in portraying the conflict of passion and reason than simply in portraying passion."

[71] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," *Euripides. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* VI (Geneva 1958) develops the sociological and environmental aspects of the play, and much of my discussion builds on his.

The revenge motif can be seen in terms of the ethical precept of harm enemies, but it also links Phaedra to the divine mechanism of the play. Phaedra fulfills Aphrodite's role, and has been, in terms of eros, little more than the goddess's pawn. Artemis (1299ff) insists on Aphrodite's presence and control of Phaedra, by that establishing Phaedra's innocence in our minds, a necessary precondition to an understanding of the play.[72] The other motivation of Phaedra, the moral standards of society, however, detaches her from that role and places her firmly in the human sphere where disgrace precipitates suicide. It is in this sphere that we can understand the complexity of her suicide and the social motivations for it.

Winnington-Ingram states: "In our play it is not Hippolytus but Phaedra who represses—or attempts to repress—her instincts, not out of puritanism, but out of respect for social obligations."[73] Phaedra's moral code results from both her *physis*, her inherited sexuality,[74] as well as her environment, *nomos*. This moral code encompasses the ideals of *sōphrosynē*, *eukleia* and *aidōs*, which create a parallelism in characterization between Hippolytus and Phaedra.[75] Hippolytus joins *aidōs* and *sōphronein* in the prologue (78–80), claiming that his moral purity raises him to a level of moral superiority (84).[76] Ironically, this very sense of superiority removes him from any proper claim on *sōphrosynē*.[77] Phaedra recognizes this fault of Hippolytus when in her exit speech she vows that he will after all learn of chastity in moderation (731). *Aidōs*, still, puzzles Phaedra.[78] Is it a pleasure or a burden? Her famous speech of ll. 375–87 has been the focus of many of the critical interpretations of the *Hippolytus*,[79] but despite various attempts to resolve the problems, Phaedra's words remain ambiguous. The concept of *aidōs* does befuddle Phaedra, and by that Euripides

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[72] W.S. Barrett, ed. *Hippolytos* (Oxford 1966) 14–5, and Conacher (above, note 66) 27, emphasize that Phaedra is the pawn of Aphrodite. Cf. A. Lesky, "Psychologie bei Euripides," in *Entretiens* VI (above, note 71) 137.

[73] Winnington-Ingram (above, note 71) 172.

[74] Ibid., 175.

[75] Conacher (above, note 66) 30ff.

[76] J. Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor 1991) 51ff, argues that Euripides uses these morally loaded words to characterize Hippolytus as a conservative upper-class citizen, "out of sympathy with the direction of Athenian policy, who habitually avoided civic involvement," i.e. as a reactionary (63).

[77] Ibid.

[78] For a general discussion of *aidōs* in Euripides, see D.B. Lombard, "Aspects of *AIDOS* in Euripides," *Acta Classica* 28 (1985) 5–12.

[79] A quick review of some of the more important interpretations shows that no scholarly consensus exists. Barrett (above, note 72) ad 381–5, posits an anacoluthon:

highlights the difference between the traditional notion of externally sanctioned *aidōs*, and the more modern notion of internal ethical considerations.[80] She knows that what is morally right conflicts with what she feels, that intellect fails in the face of passion. The verbal paradox to which she refers (387–8) concerning *aidōs*, when the same word suggests two opposing meanings depending upon the situation,

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"she adds *aidōs* to her list as an example not of *hēdonē* but of something *protethen anti tou kalou*; she has (and so have the audience) forgotten the grammatical construction of the earlier parts of the list. . .". He goes on to interpret the bad *aidōs* as "diffidence or indecisiveness." It is difficult to imagine how indecisiveness can be considered a pleasure. E.R. Dodds, "The *Aidōs* of Phaedra and the Meaning of the *Hippolytus*," *CR* 39 (1925) 103, suggests that the good *aidōs* represents Phaedra's inner morality, the shame that saves her from madness, while bad *aidōs* is respect for conventions. The specific convention to which Phaedra must yield is suppliance, but because this convention is strictly external, by yielding to it Phaedra betrays her inner self. Suppliance, in other words, gives Phaedra an outlet for confessing. This *aidōs* becomes a dangerous *hēdonē*, like long gossiping and idleness. Dodds' psychological reading leaves us wondering how a bad *aidōs* can be a pleasure, and furthermore, the external social force which motivates Phaedra to commit suicide is *eukleia*. Conacher (above, note 66) 54–5, suggests that the bad *aidōs* regarded as a pleasure "refers to the distracting enjoyment of 'taboo' subjects which, when not treated with reverence, lead to shame. One such subject particularly relevant to Phaedra's situation is obviously sex." He himself notes, however, that no extant parallel passages support his view. Other interpreters, e.g., C.W. Willink, "Some Problems of Text and Interpretation in *Hippolytus*," *CQ* 18 (1968) 11–43, and D. Kovacs, "Shame, Pleasure, and Honor in Phaedra's Great Speech (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 375–87)," *AJP* 101 (1980) 287–303, propose that *dissai* refers not to *aidōs* (385), but to *hēdonai* (383), and must be translated by its root meaning "of two sorts" rather than by its poetic extension "two." The good pleasures would include "various aspects of *to kalon*, morally good qualities because they are morally good, or they might be things like health that are so essentially innocent that they rarely if ever become temptations" (Kovacs 299). Bad pleasures would include temptations such as food, drink and sex. To support this interpretation, Kovacs posits a lacuna of a list of good and bad pleasures. There is no manuscript support whatsoever for such a lacuna, and the whole interpretation remains highly unlikely. Winnington-Ingram (above, note 71) 178, interprets Phaedra's confusion about *aidōs* against the background of her environment, her social milieu. "She has been brought up to regard a proper modesty as a virtue, particularly in a woman, particularly in an aristocrat, and yet she feels that this modesty, this reserve, this fear of criticism, can be indulged to the point of obstructing virtuous action. That is all Phaedra means." Euripides has depicted, in his references to leisure and gossip, the environment which engendered Phaedra's problem, and likewise in his reference to *aidōs*, except that *aidōs* is a mental attitude and moral standard. Winnington-Ingram seems to imply that the inner quality of *aidōs*, the self-understanding of virtue, in Phaedra's mind overshadows the external quality of the concept, the fear of societal displeasure or rejection. B. Williams (above, note 1) 95ff, discusses the "inner-directed" and "other-directed" aspects of *aidōs*.

For fuller bibliographical references for the vast number of discussions on the great speech of Phaedra (375–87), see Kovacs, 299 n. 1, and Marcel Orban, "Hippolyte: Palinodie ou Revanche," *LEC* 49 (1981) 14, n. 26.

[80] Lombard (above, note 78) 6.

underscores her confusion and her feelings of helplessness in the face of this paradox. Perhaps therein lies the key to understanding Euripides' Phaedra: unable to fathom when the idea of *aidōs* is good or bad, she turns instead to the notion of *eukleia*,[81] to which she has appealed before and a notion that admits of no ambiguity.

Eukleia, and its opposite, *dyskleia*, signify reputation, that is, societal perception and categorization of one of its members. Phaedra's guilty secret, which has both caused her confusion concerning *aidōs*, and created a private and public persona, involves her in what Zeitlin describes as a "struggle between that interior self and her external image in the eyes of society."[82] Her concern with *eukleia* has made itself felt throughout the play, and a few examples will demonstrate the importance of reputation to Phaedra, Hippolytus and the play as a whole. Aphrodite's statement in the prologue (45–6) that although Phaedra is *euklees* she will nevertheless die shows that even divinity perceives Phaedra as conforming to social rules. Phaedra picks up the notion of reputation in her great speech (373ff), where after her dismissal, as it were, of the concept of *aidōs*, she details to the chorus the steps of her reasoning after being struck with love for Hippolytus. Because silence (393), discretion and good sense (399) failed, she resolved to die, for she wishes that she "may never have many witnesses of my wrongs" (404). Phaedra here shows that she is completely aware of the social standards concerning adultery,[83] and she would rather die than live with the stigma. Phaedra's potential adultery also creates a threat to the security of the *oikos*, and renders Phaedra a latent hazard within.[84] Later in the same speech she stresses that her death also will prevent any stigma from falling on her husband and children. She prays for their rich and glorious life in Athens, with memories of a mother of good reputation (421–3).[85]

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[81] For other discussions emphasizing the importance of *eukleia*, see H. Strohm, *Euripides, Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form. Zetemata* 15 (Munich 1957) esp. 104; B.M.W. Knox, "The *Hippolytus* of Euripides," *YCS* 13 (1952) 3–31; Conacher (above, note 66); Winnington-Ingram (above, note 71); B. Frischer, "Concordia Discors and Characterization in Euripides' *Hippolytus*," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 85–100; Zeitlin (above, note 69); and D. Gilula, "A Consideration of Phaedra's *Eukleia*," *Sileno* 7 (1981) 121–33.

[82] Zeitlin (above, note 69) 100.

[83] See Lacey, (above, note 60) 113ff, and MacDowell, (above, note 60) 18, for legal and economic aspects of adultery.

[84] Goff (above, note 64) 5.

[85] Ibid., 23 points out that Phaedra "can transmit but cannot herself possess" *eukleia*.

Pressed by the nurse and the chorus to act on her desires, Phaedra refuses because one's honor must be maintained (488–9). Unfortunately, however, Phaedra surrenders to the nurse's practical relativity (502–3),[86] which, because it fails, leaves Phaedra with the prospect of a dishonorable death (687–8) since Hippolytus will proclaim her shame to all the world (692). Still determined to die honorably, she extracts from the chorus its promise of silence (715–21) and writes her suicide note, which originates in part from her need to have revenge, but most especially from her fear of dishonor. In other words, during this last critical scene of Phaedra's where her determination to die impels her to action, Phaedra thinks most specifically about *eukleia.*

Every statement concerning honor and its opposite concerns external reality. How will Phaedra's reputation be perceived, how will society respond to her? She has become focussed exclusively on social concerns, to the exclusion of her personal wants. In such circumstances, suicide becomes a duty, a sacrifice imposed by society for the continued well-being of itself. In Phaedra's case, her society demands that the social meanings of marriage remain uncontaminated, that the wife remains faithful. Her guilty secret and adulterous thoughts have left her separated from the social ideals she longs to uphold, and in her attempt to avoid the stigma of insult, she commits suicide. As Greek culture demonstrates, a close-knit society makes demands on its members, and if these demands are violated, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the individual is left in conflict with the social milieu. This individual therefore exhibits an inclination to suicide. Though society-at-large may be safe whether one individual abides by its laws or not, an individual's shame at nonconformity can precipitate suicide.

Euripides, however, depicts a complex character in Phaedra, and no one motivation or characteristic suffices to describe her. Phaedra's confusion between good and bad shame (*aidōs*) arose from her adulterous desire, which created an internal imbalance. Every member of society functions by submitting to social regulations, which prescribe one's needs and the means to acquire them. Phaedra's desire has exceeded society's marriage-imposed restraints, and so she finds herself internally in a state of anomie, because inside herself, social

[86] Knox (above, note 81) 7, demonstrates that when Phaedra succumbs to the nurse's urging, she abandons choice altogether, and disastrously entrusts her destiny to another.

norms are absent. In her initial announcement of her resolution to die (393ff), she states that love has wounded her (392). In other words, her life has been disrupted, thrown into confusion. She tells the chorus that she tried to conquer it, first by enduring it in silence (394), then by conquering it with good sense (399). Both attempts at equilibrium failed, and she finally yields to eros in death (400). Her particular type of suicide, then, reflects her particular type of problem, the external self at variance with the internal self. The external reality of society, i.e., her fear for her reputation, her fear of isolation, combined with the internal reality of her disorientation to that aspect of society that directs behavior, impelled her to commit suicide. Her suicide accomplishes her goals: she causes Hippolytus' death, and her good name is largely restored. Society's goals of preservation have prevailed.[87]

Heracles

Euripides' *Heracles* espouses many of the same ideals of the *Ajax*, but provides an interesting contrast. Whereas in the *Ajax* friends were unable to prevail upon Ajax, in the *Heracles* friendship supersedes all other considerations. That specifically human quality, endurance in the face of suffering, which Ajax acknowledged but rejected, outstrips the usual tragic motivations to suicide, and although Heracles wishes to kill himself, he does not. He expresses a wish to escape not from fear of imminent doom, but from fear of disgrace, an acceptable social motivation for suicide in extant tragedy that finally Heracles chooses to sublimate in the name of friendship and endurance.

Megara, in the "suppliant" action of the play, champions the view that in the face of their dire situation the suppliants by voluntary death will bring upon themselves good repute, whereas in resisting necessity (including voluntary death) they will prove cowards and become objects of ridicule to their enemies (282ff). Believing that she is acting exactly as her husband would, she claims that he would not want his sons to live as cowards (289ff). Megara presents the traditional and heroic ethos: death before dishonor. Though herself concerned with typical female and domestic concerns, here she assumes

[87] See Goff (above, note 64) 117ff, for a discussion of the connection between ritual cult and tragedy in respect to the closing ritual of the *Hippolytus*, that is the remedy for the violence of the play. She suggests, however, that "the closing ritual simultaneously exalts and undermines the play's achievement" (125).

the male code as her own, and becomes a surrogate for her husband.[88] The aristocratic notion of human nobility and courage creates an important thematic link between the opening and closing movements of the play. By putting its expression first into the mouth of Megara, Euripides stirs us to realization of its significance, for the female Megara internalizes the aristocratic motto, disgraces break a man of noble birth (292–3), and so foreshadows and contrasts with Heracles' final denial of the same traditional formula. This crucial theme that links Megara and Heracles functions on one level both to ennoble Megara and by its negation to diminish and compromise Heracles' own heroism. Furthermore, by the end of the play Heracles *has* become in many ways an object of ridicule for Hera, for his society and even for Theseus. On another level, however, popular ethics seem to shift in their emphasis.

Heracles seems to embrace the aristocratic motto of death before disgrace several times throughout the play before his final rejection of it. On his first appearance, after he learns of Lycus' treachery concerning his family, he bids farewell to his labors and resolves to defend his family, even if he should die in their defence. As in Megara's case, shame is more odious and more frightening even than death itself. As he escorts Megara and his sons inside, Heracles assumes the role of strong family protector and bids them to be courageous. He claims to "have no wings to flee from friends" (628), yet he will have occasion later to wish for wings for a quick escape. Unaware of the thick irony in his words, he asks his sons if they think they are going to death (630). Heracles proceeds to put another aspect of the heroic code into action: do good to one's friends and harm to one's enemies. As he murders Lycus, the chorus of old men, equally imbued with the traditional ethic, sings a song of triumph for Heracles' victorious contest (*ton Hērakleous kallinikon agōna* 788–9).

But in a quick reversal of fortune, Hera sends Lyssa to drive Heracles mad and consequently to murder his own children and wife,[89] after which the humanized Heracles realizes that his heroism is

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[88] For Megara's role as surrogate for Heracles, see A.N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison 1987) 247–51, esp. p. 43 for her cogent objections to Burnett's interpretation of the "just desserts" of Megara for failing to behave as a proper suppliant. Cf. also V. Ehrenberg, *Aspects of the Ancient World* (Oxford 1946) 158.

[89] For a discussion of the Iris-Lyssa scene see K. Hartigan, "Euripidean Madness:

inappropriate, and the world has become grimly limited.[90] It is precisely with this grimmer world in mind that Heracles' decision to live ought to be examined. After Heracles recovers from his madness, but before he realizes the full import of his actions, he and Amphitryon blame Hera for the events (1127–8), as will Theseus later (1191). Indeed, Hera has been the bane of Heracles since his birth (1264ff), and will, of course, prevail in the end. After Amphitryon enlightens Heracles about his part in the murders, Heracles immediately questions his continuing existence, since he sees his new role as avenger of his children's murder (1147). Heracles, in other words, continues to embrace the traditional aristocratic motto that calls for "harm to one's enemies," and as murderer *and* avenger, suicide affords the most efficacious solution to this paradoxical situation. He imagines various methods: leaping from a rock, stabbing himself or burning his flesh (1148–51). Heracles sees suicide alone as the means of escape from his disgrace (*dyskleia* 1152).

When Theseus approaches (1153–4) and shatters Heracles' suicidal reverie, Heracles' shame becomes even more acute. In the presence of the dearest of all his guest-hosts (1156), he wishes for a still quicker

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Herakles and Orestes," *G&R* 34 (1987) 126–35; K.H. Lee, "The Iris-Lyssa Scene," *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 44–53, and his bibliographical references. Lee attempts to integrate the scene into the play by stressing the importance of *dikē*, both in the first part of the play where we witnessed and applauded justice made possible by Heracles, and in part two where a divine justice provides a shocking contrast. And see especially his well-taken comment, "The play as a whole goes further and shows that even to make such judgements is to commit the error of applying to a world we scarcely understand the standards which prevail in our own" (53).

[90] It has been persuasively argued by J. Gregory, "Euripides' 'Heracles'," *YCS* 25 (1977) 259–75; S. Barlow, "Structure and Dramatic Realism in Euripides' *Heracles*," *G&R* 29.2 (1982) 115–25; and D. Furley, "Euripides on the Sanity of Heracles," in *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster I*, edd. J.H. Betts, J.T. Hooker and J.R. Green, (Bristol 1986), that much of the movement of the play derives from the humanization of Heracles which is intimately connected with the madness scene. Gregory, 275, focusses on the importance of the dual fathership of Heracles and his progress from being wholly the son of Zeus to wholly the son of Amphitryon. Barlow, 125, compares the second stasimon that precedes the madness scene and that concerns the labors of Heracles with the messenger speech after the madness of Heracles, which is firmly fixed temporally, and which gives unromantic and unsentimental evidence of his more recent actions. "The labours of Heracles with their glory and heroism are converted to hideous new circumstances where the same characteristics of the hero exist but are used in a tragically inappropriate way." Furley, 108, argues that Euripides presents first the mythical hero followed by "the appalling disruption of the morality of this uncomplicated world brought about by Herakles' murder of his own family" in order to hint in the third part at "a new and different system of values that will apply in a grimmer world of much more limited possibilities."

escape: "Oh where will I, winged or going beneath the earth, find release from the evils?" (1157–88). Those wings he teased his sons about earlier seem quite desirable to Heracles now, but just as unrealistic and unattainable. Here the unelaborate escape wish, of a common type often associated with actual suicide victims, demonstrates the desperation Heracles feels, and his quick recourse to thoughts of suicide. Fearing shame for himself and pollution for Theseus (1160–2), Heracles continues to consider escape by suicide the answer, and to Theseus' injunction that courage means "to bear and not to reject pains from the gods" (1228), Heracles describes just how miserable his situation is (1237). Despite Heracles' efforts to remove Theseus from his polluted presence (1233), Theseus steadfastly insists on friendship and pity (1234, 1236). In chapter one I argued that suicide creates no pollution beyond that typically created by death. Heracles' wish to die by his hand to stave off from Theseus the pollution of a murder reflects the cultural attitudes of the fifth-century audience to suicide. In other words, suicide would stop the miasma of murder, not further it. Theseus concurs with Heracles that he suffers more *kaka* than anyone else: "You touch heaven with your wretchedness from below" (1240) in response to which Heracles states again his readiness to die (1241). Interestingly, Theseus now interprets Heracles' words of death as a *threat* to the gods ("Do you think the gods care about your threats?" 1241).[91] In other words, Heracles first wants to take revenge on the murderer of his family, himself, and secondly wishes to punish the gods by his suicide. Theseus perceives the presumption in this threat (1244), and proceeds to attempt to convince Heracles that his next death threat (1247) reflects the thoughts of an ordinary man (1248). Euripides has dramatized social motivations for a suicide: shame, dishonor, the right to punish transgressors, fear of pollution of others by one's continued existence and the isolation that results from such an accumulation of motives, and they resemble those Sophocles created for Ajax.[92] Just as Ajax

[91] For an interesting discussion of suicide as a means to vengeance see M. Delcourt, "Le Suicide par vengeance dans la Grèce ancienne," *RHR* 119 (1939) 154–71.

[92] See e.g., Furley (above, note 90) 102f, who concludes that "the comparison makes us see in the play a criticism of the values espoused by Ajax, and a claim that Herakles behaves better than Ajax." Although much of his interpretation is admirable, his conclusion seems unjustified in light of suicide in tragedy in general. J. de Romilly, "Le refus du suicide dans l'Héraclès d'Euripide," *Archaeognosia* 1 (1980) 1–10, sees the difference between Ajax and Heracles as that between honor and suffering, and believes Euripides presents a new attitude towards suicide, namely,

felt isolation from the land, men and gods (*Ajax* 458ff), so too, does Heracles find himself hateful to all (1295–1301). His fear of *dyskleia* seems the only motive of any importance in Heracles' thoughts.[93] The isolation of dishonor and the fear of disgrace he experiences underscore his feelings of deviation from traditional social values. The heroic society that praised the often violent labors of Heracles cannot now praise him in the midst of his murders, and Heracles finds himself with no links to it and no basis for existence. His suicide, like Ajax's, would by its execution reinforce the values of the heroic society. Yet, unlike Ajax, he lives, proving himself human and malleable in a way Ajax was not, proving himself able to survive the transition from one set of ethics to another. The world Euripides creates for his hero is seductive and inviting, despite its imperfections and drawbacks, while Sophocles' hero scorned any flawed society or any different role he might play in it. Recent literature on the *Heracles* emphasizes an element of optimism in the third part, an element of "human heroism." This view rests on a conception of the "courage to live"[94] rather than the traditional aristocratic attitude as articulated especially by Megara in this play, but also by Amphitryon, Heracles and implicitly the chorus, and by many other notable suicide victims in extant tragedy. In every case when social motivations of dishonor and shame render it expedient to commit suicide, characters do so without condemnation. Heracles, as he himself says (1257ff) has always lived an unenviable life that required superhuman levels of endurance. Theseus now blames Heracles for too-little *tlemosynē*, and implies that now, as in Heracles' past labors, endurance will lead to glory. Euripides chooses him appropriately, then, to articulate another aspect of tragic suicide. Plato and Aristotle disapprove of suicide over loss only, and Euripides situates in Greek ethics a debate on suicide. The usual pro-suicide attitude of Greek tragedy and Greek ethics is modified by the concept of endurance.

Theseus has taken it upon himself to prevent Heracles from suicide. Besides the aspects discussed above their dialogue also explores

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that death is not the difficult solution, but the easy one. She takes an additional (and insupportable) step and claims that this reflects a new attitude to suicide in society at large in the fifth century.

[93] Furley (above, note 90) 109.

[94] This notion seems even to have made itself felt in textual criticism. For example, l. 1351 was emended by Wecklein, and subsequently adopted by all editors, from *enkarterēso thanaton* to *enkarterēso bioton*.

aspects of friendship[95]: Theseus prevails on Heracles' duties as a friend until he finally abandons his suicidal desires. Though resolved at first to commit suicide in terms of taking revenge on a murderer, in other words in terms of heroic *aretē*,[96] Heracles instead chooses life, showing that friendship is a seductive alternative to the heroic code of honor.[97] He does indeed prove his human nature in electing to live with disgrace rather than die with honor. With Theseus' help, Heracles convinces himself that to die would be cowardice, and to accept fate means courage (1347–51). Earlier Megara also had acknowledged the weight of necessity but persisted in that aspect of *aretē* that prescribes death, even death by suicide, over dishonor. However, as with all Heracles' *agones*, the murders are really not his fault, and, therefore, society does not demand his death. He can, as a result, treat the murders as the kind of suffering for which endurance, rather than shame, is the proper response.

Euripides seemingly has articulated a new code, one in which moral relativity and human friendship prevail and succeed in supplanting older traditional notions. Yet, Theseus and Heracles have also discussed the divine mechanism involved; namely, the wife of Zeus (1312), and though Theseus prevails in the name of human friendship, Hera in the end triumphs (1309–10; 1392–3). Heracles, far from opting for that purely human answer to pain, suicide, a death that he believed would have avenged him on the gods, continues to live, but in disgrace and at the mercy of Hera who "has destroyed the benefactors of Greece, though they were guiltless" (1309–10). Heracles presents a completely pitiful figure at the end of his play, weeping, unable to rise and dependent on Theseus for the completion of his labors (1386ff). Ironically, even Theseus' patience grows short with Heracles' maudlin focus on his sorrows, and he tells him that no one, witnessing Heracles' weakness, will praise him (1412). In addition, although Theseus did not formerly think Heracles low (*tapeinos* 1413), now he wonders where that famous Heracles is (1414). To Heracles' final question to Theseus: "Then will you say that I am abased by my

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[95] For discussion of friendship as an important theme see, for example, J.T. Sheppard, "The Formal Beauty of the *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* 10 (1916) 72–80; H.H.O. Chalk, "*Aretē* and *Bia* in Euripides' *Heracles*," *JHS* 82 (1962) 7–18; and Furley (above, note 90).

[96] For this aspect, see Chalk (above, note 95), and A.W.H. Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* n.s. 16 (1966) 193–219.

[97] Furley (above, note 90) 112.

evils?" (1417), Theseus gives no reply, merely a command, implicitly agreeing with Heracles' complaint that Theseus should be understanding (1417–8).[98] Theseus brings the virtue of endurance into play in a context where it seems unexpected, and reiterates the gap between men and gods and man's insignificance and susceptibility to divine interference.[99] Theseus uses the gods because they endure committing wrong acts; Heracles' insistence that they do not commit such acts leaves his own suffering completely inexplicable, but leaves open the underlying issue of where endurance is appropriate. The play therefore ends not by reaffirming heroic values but by suggesting acceptance of the importance of *tlemosynē* and the approval of friends. This is certainly a more democratic attitude than the aristocratic stance of Ajax or Megara, and perhaps reflects Euripides' call to fellow Athenians to endure the late fifth-century breakdown of Athenian life.[100]

The *Heracles* is the only extant tragedy that sets up a suicide, a suicide with social motivations and therefore understandable and pitiable, and one that shows resolution in the face of disgrace, only to have the intended suicide victim cast aside such resolution because endurance rather than escape is called for.[101] Suicide, repeatedly, provides tragic characters, e.g., Ajax, Deianeira and Phaedra, with an honorable escape from horrible events, and is, as the chorus in the *Hecuba* (1107–8) tells us, pardonable and sometimes desirable. Heracles' refusal to commit suicide seems in the end to be an

[98] Michelini (above, note 88) 261 and n. 134, has called Theseus a "well meaning tormentor" to explain this apparent anomaly at the end of the play. Michelini also concludes that "Theseus' brisk and vigorous tone shows him superior in emotional control to Heracles, who is completely immured in his misery, but at the same time it suggests that Theseus has only a superficial understanding of the tragic situation."

[99] For an interesting discussion of the notorious lines 1340–6, see Lee (above, note 89) 43–5. He suggests that Heracles' words are not meant to propound an ideal concept of the gods but rather simply to deny Theseus' conclusions of l. 1319 that the gods tolerate their own guilt. Heracles states simply "the gods get what they want." Cf. also H. Yunis, *A New Creed: Fundamental Religious Beliefs in the Athenian Polis and the Euripidean Drama. Hypomnemata* 91 (1988) 159ff, who claims that Heracles makes a distinction between the true sense of the term god (i.e. a being that lacks nothing) and the so-called gods of the poets.

[100] Van Hooff (above, note 3) 146–7, suggests that Heracles here internalizes the values of real Athenian society at the end of the fifth century, and that the play "refines the traditional themes and makes them digestible for the public of the polis." See also, Gregory, *Instruction* (above, note 76) 121ff.

[101] Yunis (above, note 99) 170 adds that Heracles based his decision to refrain from suicide on the realization that the gods had treated him unfairly, and on "the awareness of shattered reciprocity with immoral gods" (169).

addition to the regular associations of tragic suicide, the essence of which is noble, virtuous, courageous and liberating when the demands of society supersede the individual's.

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Suicide has resulted from a possible compromise of values in all of the above cases. If values define how society demands its members to live, then society may require its members to die to maintain them. Fifth-century tragedy complicates the issue further by challenging many of the traditional, Homeric values. Individuals, like Ajax or Heracles, caught between tradition and change often feel a propensity to suicide. Deianeira and Phaedra threaten society by their desires and actions, and so society can only be preserved by their deaths. In Ajax's case, intense shame brought on by "what people will say," combined with a precarious position between two value systems, could only lead to suicide. For Deianeira, the fear of shame at failure and the fear of loss of her customary role compel her to self-destruction. Ironically her silent behavior verifies her guilt. Phaedra fears to an exorbitant extent the loss of her good name as well as the loss of her children's reputations, but she also feels shame at her unnatural desire for Hippolytus. Heracles trusts in friendship and decides that endurance is a more noble value than reputation or shame.

The playwrights examine and depict suicide in light of social values: *aidōs*, so closely related to failure intentional or not, consumes the victims who want *eukleia* more than life. This traditional value seems not to change from Homeric times through the fifth century, though other values become important and eclipse it somewhat. For example, the *physis/nomos* dichotomy addressed by Euripides in the *Hippolytus* allows an escape from oppressive *aidōs*, because something that is shameful by convention might not be as devastating as something shameful by nature. The danger lies in the fact that someone might use to his or her own advantage the distinction between truly shameful things and those that are not. In the *Hippolytus*, instead of *physis/nomos* being a subset of *aidōs* or *eukleia*, the latter become subsumed under the former. Furthermore in the *Hippolytus*, even the concept of moderation is revised from an aristocratic quietism to a concept compatible with the democracy of imperial Athens. And significant in this redefinition is the concept of *syngnōmē*, forgiveness,

which Hippolytus displays to Theseus.[102] The *Heracles*, with its emphasis on *tlemosynē* and *philia*, offers a more relative code of values, a code requiring and encouraging flexibility and altruism. The rigid Homeric code of the *eugenēs* adhered to by Ajax emphasizing individual *aretē* becomes flexible and more human and recognizes the importance of the individual as a functioning and caring member of society, who owes a duty not only to himself but to loyal friends and family.

[102] Gregory, *Instruction* (above, note 76) 74ff.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUICIDE NOTE: ESCAPE SONGS

When the gods send evils (*kaka*), one cannot escape.
Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes* 719

Suicide frequently allows an escape from future suffering in a life that has become burdened with unbearable pain, and suicidal desires often find articulation in the form of suicide notes before the deed occurs. Frequently in tragedy, "escape songs"[1] express a sentiment usually in lyrics of a wish to flee from a dire situation by, e.g., growing wings and flying away or by being swallowed up by the earth. The sentiment can be of varying length and intensity, and can be expressed by the chorus and characters alike. If the suicide victim himself or herself does not sing of escape, then a character or the chorus who has established an emphathetic relationship with the victim sings of escape in proximity to the suicide. In extant tragedies involving suicides or suicidal thoughts, escape songs function primarily as death wishes: suicide notes, as it were. For the most part, each victim attempts suicide to obtain freedom from future suffering, real or imagined, but their notes, whether articulated by themselves or by others, give insight into their motivations to self-destruction.

Desiderative escape songs figure in several extant tragedies and two fragmentary plays,[2] but for my immediate purposes of exploring the sentiment in its connection with suicides, five plays are of interest: Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens*, Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, and Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *Andromache* and *Hecuba*. The wish to escape in

[1] This phenomenon has received scholarly treatment under such phrases as "ode d'évasion" [so N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass. 1987) 18]; and "asking the way," [so T. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley 1982) 162], but the former treatment limits the scope of the motif to escape by flight, and the latter seems too prosaic for this lyrical and emotional sentiment.

[2] In addition to the six plays discussed here, the motif occurs in Sophocles' *O.C.* 1081ff and *Oinomaos* fr. 476 (Radt); Euripides' *Alcestis* 213ff, *Helen* 1478ff, *Ion* 796ff and 1238f, *Medea* 1296ff, *Orestes* 1375, *Phaethon* fr. 781.66ff and *Supplices* 829–30. The typical wishes expressed in them have become accepted as something of a commonplace. So W.S. Barrett, ed., *Euripides Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) on l. 732.

each of these plays receives elaborate lyric treatment, and yet no two escape songs reflect the same means of escape, nor do they function in the same way dramatically. Upon examination the differences will become apparent, and as with all things poetic, large categorizations of "commonplaces" will prove misleading and unuseful. Sometimes the wish to escape issues from the intended suicide victim; at other times from sympathetic bystanders. In all five plays, however, the wish to escape and a threat, attempt or act of suicide are closely connected, which permits us to consider suicide in all its aspects. In a sense, suicide can be understood as the final and fatal escape, and the act of suicide not only lends poignant irony to the desire expressed in song, but also reveals the escape song as a death wish. The dark and foreboding imagery of many of these songs verifies this suggestion, as does the link established in the *Hecuba* between escape songs and suicide. The various social motivations impelling characters to sing of escape show tragic suicides to be understandable and pitiable, in light of external pressures, when fear of continued suffering couples with other ethical considerations.

Aeschylus' Suppliant Maidens

The dominant issue in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens* revolves not around burial rights but around marriage, a theme that they place in the context of popular ethics by establishing at the outset that they are not exiles because they have committed any crime like murder, but because they are fleeing impious marriages.[3] The Suppliants although obedient to their father are not passive and sorrowful, but bold and determined to have their way, a determination revealed through the lengths to which they will go to avoid marriage: they would prefer to kill themselves. Their threat of suicide forms an important component in the fabric of the play, beginning as a veiled reference and becoming more and more ominous as the action proceeds. The threat takes on two aspects: at first it functions as a mode of coercion, but after its success, the threat emanates more personally from a sense of

[3] Bibliography includes J.H. Finley, Jr., *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1955), "The *Suppliants*"; L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford 1962) 94–9; A.F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplices: Play and Trilogy* (Cambridge 1969); H. Friis Johansen and E.W. Whittle, edd., *Aeschylus: The Suppliants* (Copenhagen 1980); and R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983) 55–72.

despair and assumes a more frantic and desperate tone. We can uncover in part the complexity of Aeschylus' characterization of the Suppliants by tracing the threats through the play.

The first hint of a death wish comes as early as 112ff in their opening lyrics, where they honor themselves though living with funeral dirges (116). They pray to the gods for salvation from the marriage that they abhor,[4] and if they do not receive help, they will reach Zeus of the dead by hanging themselves (154–60). The threat thus far is between the maidens and the gods in the presence of their father. They will soon use it to their advantage in persuading the Argive king to grant them asylum, since the proper claims of *xenia* will prove inadequate.

During the interview between the Danaids and King Pelasgus, two clashing perspectives on a king's role emerge, but in the end the Suppliants prevail in theirs because of their suicide notice. The king conceives of and describes his position as essentially equal to his people and will make no promises without the people (365–9). The Suppliants insist on their barbarian and opposite viewpoint: namely, the king is the sovereign commander (370–6). They end their counterargument with ominous words: *agos phulassou* (Beware of pollution 376). Their threat of pollution throws Pelasgus into confusion, in part because of its vagueness, in part because if he upholds the Suppliants claim to *xenia* he risks throwing his people into war. Seeming to waver (379–80), nonetheless he persists in his stand concerning kingship, vowing not to act without the people (398–9), and finally he attempts to wash his hands of the problem (452).

To prevail, therefore, the Suppliants reveal their strongest weapon: they will use the belts and clasps of their dresses to adorn the statues of the gods with new tablets (457, 463). When asked by the king to speak simply, they at last reply clearly that they will as quickly as possible hang themselves from the gods (465). This threat forms the very turning point of the play where religious authority prevails over law.[5] Pelasgus, in fear of the miasma that death in the sanctuary would cause, can only consent. He directs them to seek refuge at altars of the native gods so that he may avoid reproach, and they may receive pity (483–8). In other words, his relationship to the people

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[4] The Danaids pray 7 times for escape in this play. See J.D. Mikalson, "Unanswered Prayers in Greek Tragedy," *JHS* 109 (1989) 81–98, esp. 93–4.

[5] Finley (above, note 3) 202.

of Argos necessarily changes. No longer can he work in common with them; instead, he must assume a role similar to, if less radical than, the one that the Suppliants wished. After the straightforward suicide threat, Pelasgus promises to become not just a spokesman for the Suppliants, but a very persuasive one.[6] The Suppliants' threat to kill themselves, which they directed at the gods and Pelasgus, had coercion as its goal. In a coercive threat, sympathy lies with the "coerced" more than with the threateners, and one expects the object of coercion to capitulate to the demand, in the case of Pelasgus for his and his city's benefit. The suicide threat effectively convinced the king to undertake the Suppliants' cause against the Egyptians, and accordingly the coercive feature of the threat may now recede into the background. Yet, another suicide threat occurs in the "Escape Song," which the Suppliants sing after learning that the Egyptians have been sighted, and it is of a different nature from their earlier threats.

The motif of escape plays an important role throughout the play; in fact, the Suppliants' prime motivation, stated explicitly in the parodos, is escape from the dread marriage with their cousins (5–10). They have made their escape, they tell us, by sea (14), and interestingly this constitutes their only reference to the sea as a kindly entity. For the remainder of the play, the sea connotes the disaster threatened by the Egyptians, and so loses its capacity to be a way of escape.

The theme of escape continues in the prologue and becomes a refrain (142/152) addressed first to Zeus, then to Artemis. Each time they seek escape from the marriage bed. During the Suppliants' interview with King Pelasgus, they speak of flight twice: at 329 they refer to their flight as "unexpected" (*anelpiston*) but from hate of the marriage bed (331). Again, at 394 to the king's insistence on law, the Suppliants respond that the gods sanction their escape from marriage.

Consequent to this pivotal action three great odes with brief episodes interspersed occupy the central part of the drama. The three stasima resemble each other in that each calls upon Zeus for assistance, but they differ from one another significantly in tone. The first stasimon (524ff) is best described as an ode of hopeful anticipation. The Suppliants, having forced the king to assume their cause

[6] For the *peitho/bia* opposition in the play and their effect in both the erotic and political spheres, see R.G.A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study in Peitho* (Cambridge 1982), 67–90.

beyond what his normal position in Argos would permit, nonetheless must await the response of the people. Left alone at the sanctuary, they call on Zeus as the deliverer of Io and progenitor of Epaphus. They sing of Io's escape (542) because they hope to receive the same kindness from Zeus as Io had,[7] and they wish to emphasize their rights under *xenia*.

A brief episode in which Danaus relays the favorable vote of the people separates this hopeful ode from the second stasimon, the ode of thanks (625ff). In this song, the Suppliants call upon Zeus to bless the people of Argos, with a marked conventionality and simplicity.[8] Their demand of Zeus in the first stasimon to use "compulsion" gives way to a request to him to shower the Argives with prosperity, fertility and peace. The level of serenity achieved by this ode, however, quickly disintegrates when Danaus in the next brief episode espies the Egyptians on the high seas, and exits to secure help. The Suppliants again find themselves alone, but unlike their hopeful if anxious emotional state in the first stasimon, the strongest emotion evidenced by the third stasimon is terror, instilled by the arrival of the Egyptians and augmented by the absence of their father.[9]

The third stasimon (776ff) is a tour de force of an escape wish, although the entire ode exudes dark yearnings for death unlike any other escape song in Greek tragedy. Land, specifically the Apian land (118/128; 260), and not the sea has been constantly equated with safety. Accordingly, their first thoughts of an escape place in this ode turn to a dark abyss in the Apian land (777–8), though a dark abyss offers little hope of a lifesaving escape. Similarly, their next wish to become smoke and unseen dust (779ff) would secure escape by death only, not an escape to a continued existence in different circumstances. In the first antistrophe they state clearly the sentiments hinted at in the strophe, namely, their wish to die. Willingly would they die by hanging (789), and they would prefer Hades as husband (791) to their cousins. This suicide threat now concerns only themselves, and

[7] One of the ironies of the Danaids' situation arises because they never seem to realize the difference between their fate and Io's. Rosenmeyer (above, note 1) 158, argues that the identification helps to define their character, i.e., it "reveals too confident an assumption of identity." See also R.D. Murray, *The Motif of Io in Aeschylus' Suppliants* (Princeton 1958).

[8] Rosenmeyer (above, note 1) 156, goes so far as to call this ode routine and formulaic. Certainly it does not seem to reach the poetic heights of the first or third stasimon.

[9] Ibid., 179.

with no one to coerce there is only despair and desperation. They sing this ode alone, fearfully believing that they will be forced into a distasteful union: The knowledge that their former coercive threat succeeded means nothing to them, and they fall back on their resources for escape from the dread marriage to their cousins. Still, their resources are negative, i.e., their only salvation is death and they articulate the idea of death in terms of marriage to Hades.

This single occurrence of the Bride of Hades motif in extant Aeschylus reveals a great deal about the Suppliants. The philological issue here is whether the verb *anassō* can assume the sense of "to be master of as husband."[10] In this play where marriage is the dominant theme and where the Suppliants constantly equate the unmarried state with an untamed state (e.g., 143, 149, 153, etc.), the possibility cannot be denied. The result of their death as they see it will be an erotic union, a marriage to the god of the underworld, and a marriage over which they have control to the extent that they choose it, but paradoxically one in which they will at last be tamed. T. Gantz[11] notes the ambiguous language of murder and procreation in the drama, and concludes that the Danaids pervert the natural order by denying procreation. The denial of procreation is latent in the Bride of Hades motif, and their perversion of the natural order can be understood in sociological terms. Rather than submit to the rules of a society that betrothed them, in their eyes at least, to undesirable mates, they seem to emphasize their freedom from such rules by taking control of their lives and futures. They remove themselves from typically female societal regulations, both their Egyptian ones in refusing a prescribed marriage, and the Argive ones by unduly influencing political decisions in forcing the king to act "kingly" rather than democratically. Their final suicide threat shows the extent to which they will go to assume responsibility. The Bride of Hades metaphor, in connection with the threat of killing themselves, rings with ominous violence, and by it Aeschylus emphasizes the Danaids' bold and violent natures.[12]

The second strophe continues the specific nature of their wish to escape by dying, and they imagine death by jumping (792–9). In the

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[10] Friis Johansen and Whittle (above, note 3) ad loc.

[11] "Love and Death in the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus," *Phoenix* 32 (1978) 279–87.

[12] My position concerning the "complex question which can no longer be avoided" [Winnington-Ingram (above, note 3) 59] will be clear from this discussion. Namely, were the Danaids opposed to marriage per se or just marriage with their cousins?

second antistrophe the maidens morbidly contemplate the aftermath of death when their bodies will be prey for dogs and birds (800–1). They conclude that only in death will they find freedom from their ills (*eleutheroutai kakōn* 802–3), and the death they seek would be self-actualized.

They have imagined burial while alive and death by fire (first strophe), death by hanging (first antistrophe) and death by jumping (second strophe). Significantly, death by the sword does not seem an option. Just as the Danaids equate the sea, which in other escape songs provides a means of escape, with disaster only, so the sword, a virile weapon, can only remind them of their cousins and so offers no soothing release to them. Their emotions, reflected in part in the use of singular or plural references to themselves,[13] have ranged from a collective appeal to the land to a subjective and individual expression of fear. The Danaids' escape song begins and develops itself as a personal ode of terror, but becomes more paradeigmatic in its prayer to Zeus. Having exhausted all possible ways of death open to them and with death by sword excluded, they turn again to Zeus and demand protection from him (811ff). The ode ends with a gnomic utterance of Zeus' power as the balancer of all things (822–4). This one magnificent ode combines most Aeschylean choral possibilities,[14] but it is in its essence an expanded suicide threat. Escape equals death, nothing more nor less. They neither seek nor envision a life in a place to which they have escaped, only death. The escape song, then, assumes a forbidding and violent tone, full of fear and hopelessness. Fear has motivated the maidens to bold and dangerous acts throughout the drama. The escape song transforms into lyric expression their persistent demand for protection, which now, they fear, can only be accomplished by suicide.

A difference exists between this great death wish and the former coercive threat of suicide to Pelasgus. In dramatic terms, the threats

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If the Bride of Hades metaphor means simply to die, then it would appear that no new information about their attitudes can be gleaned from the statement of 791. However, the metaphor is much more complex than a simple equivalence to death. The metaphor is in fact erotic and often alludes to a loss of virginity. Aeschylus employs the metaphor thus, and his Suppliants can be understood as intimating that *any* marriage, and all that marriage entails, is preferable to a specific marriage with their cousins.

[13] M. Kaimio, *The Chorus of Greek Drama* (Helsinki 1970) 242–3.

[14] Rosenmeyer (above, note 1) 148ff, classifies the odes of Aeschylus into three types: the narrative/paradeigmatic, the personal and the gnomic.

perform very dissimilar functions. The coercive threat formed a pivot for the action of the play and carried the action forward. The lyrical death wish of the escape song halts the action. Aeschylus forces us to feel fear and pity for the Suppliants because of the urgency of their predicament, although their very wishes intensify their violent natures. Never does Aeschylus allow us to lose sight of the control the maidens seek to exercise. Each stasimon, though in different ways, makes a demand of Zeus. The three stasima carry us through an enormous range of emotions from hopeful anticipation to serenity to trembling expectation, and yet each stasimon marks a pause, a moment to reflect on the Suppliants and their relationship with Zeus that remains misconceived through the end of the play and, so it has been suggested, the whole trilogy.[15]

The escape song of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens* is scarcely escapist. It contains no hope, no thoughts for a different kind of existence free from cares and compulsions. Every option for freedom the Suppliants conceive involves thoughts of death. Yet the maidens do not commit suicide, and their "suicide note," the escape song, gives expression to an unfulfilled desire,[16] and creates a static moment in the play. The escape song in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* functions very differently in the dramaturgy of the play, and builds a bridge between the two parts of the drama.

Women of Trachis

The chorus, not the potential suicide victim, sings of escape in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, but in a way that emphasizes and continues its solid identification with Deianeira, a phenomenon that began at the start of the play. Deianeira's story is one of a passive world of deception and silence, and she kills herself to escape further disgrace. Accordingly, the imagery of the song tends more to passivity than the imagery of the great escape song of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens*, a song that reflected the maidens' need for control. The choral wish

[15] Bibliography on the trilogy includes R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "The Danaid Trilogy," *JHS* 81 (1961) 141–52; Garvie (above, note 3) chapter 5 with full bibliographical citations; Friis Johansen and Whittle (above, note 3) I.40–55; and M. Sicherl, "Die Tragik der Danaiden," *Museum Helveticum* 43 (1986) 81–110.

[16] Because of the emphatic repetition of the motif of suicide in this part of the trilogy, it is possible that suicide might have played an important role in the other two plays of the trilogy.

for escape here (953–8) caps Deianeira's role, as it occurs in the lament following the nurse's description of the suicide of the wife of Heracles.

The first strophe and antistrophe of the lament (947–52) contain the standard elements of a threnos: questions, asyndeton, assonance, antithesis and repetition create a sense of hesitation usually found in laments.[17] The chorus of young Trachinians, sympathetic to Deianeira throughout the drama, naturally begins a lament for her upon the news of her death. In the second strophe, the chorus longs to escape: would that some strong (*anemoessa*), fair (*epouros*) breeze might come to my hearth, which might carry me away from here (953–5). The audience naturally assumes that the chorus refers to an escape from Deianeira's tragedy, for the chorus' entire sympathy has lain with her. Even the form of the escape song emphasizes the choral empathy for her: Sophocles has portrayed Deianeira as a passive woman who in a bad situation actively pursued a desperate course, misconceived and consequently disastrous.[18] The chorus, on the other hand, has generally played the part of confidante, and occasionally urged Deianeira to action. In other words, the chorus has not assumed a passive role. However, when Deianeira dies, the chorus as it were does adopt her passive and fearful character. The wish to escape on close inspection is confused and passive: the chorus desires to put its fate into the breezes simultaneously destructive (*anemoessa*; cf. Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 591–2, where the adjective refers to the wind of a hurricane) and kindly (*epouros*). Let the wind carry the young girls where it will. This sentiment differs from the escape wish of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens* where those headstrong maidens envisioned modes of escape that they actively could control, for they intended to manipulate their destiny. The escape song in the *Women of Trachis* also differs from those in which one wishes to grow wings and fly away to a specific destination, as we shall see below. Here it is enough to note that with wings one can maneuver; surrender to the winds, on the other hand, means complete submission. We can, then, see in this choral emotion, uncharacteristic for at least this chorus, a final comment on Deianeira's life, a suicide note, so to speak, marking Deianeira's passive life gone disastrously active.

[17] M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974) 161–2; and P.E. Easterling, ed., *Sophocles: Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982) ad loc.

[18] See my chapter two for a sustained discussion of Deianeira and her suicide, and the bibliography cited there.

But in an unexpected move, the chorus abruptly changes directions and we discover that it wishes to escape not from the tragedy within the house, but from the experience of the plight of Heracles. It has expressed this wish to flee so as not to die just from looking at Heracles (955–9). At this point, the chorus has not yet noticed the cortege of Heracles,[19] and the transferral of its compassion from Deianeira to Heracles does double duty: on the one hand, it completes compactly and subtly the tragedy of Deianeira, while on the other hand it carries the dramatic action forward by turning our attention toward Heracles. Yet, its compassion has turned to dread, and for the remainder of the tragedy the chorus, like Deianeira, recedes into the background. Having assumed the passivity of its mistress, and therefore having empathized with her completely even in her fear, the chorus must stand in near silence for the duration of the play.

Aeschylus stopped dramatic action with his escape song while Sophocles bridged action with his. Euripides uses the lyric wish to be somewhere else to represent a "hope for a future which by its very difference defines the present."[20] Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *Andromache* and *Hecuba* present an actual suicide, a suicide attempt, and musings on the suitability of suicide, but similar longings for escape accompany each.

Hippolytus

In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Theseus, Phaedra and Hippolytus, in their individual solutions to a common problem, the desire to uphold ethical and social ideals, become inextricably linked together. Their destinies rebound and reverberate through the play not only in the imagery of escape wishes, wishes that in the end do nothing but to reveal the idleness of human aspirations in the face of divinity, but also in the reality of an actual suicide note.

Phaedra's suicide perpetuates an interlacing of sympathies with the chorus. The choral empathy with a suicide victim that we noticed in the *Women of Trachis* also figures prominently in an interpretation of

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[19] Easterling (above, note 17) ad loc. See also T.F. Hoey, "The *Trachiniae* and the Unity of Hero," *Arethusa* 3 (1970) 1–22, esp. 11ff, for a discussion of the structural transition from Deianeira to Heracles which this ode helps to create.

[20] S.A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971) 41.

the great escape song in the *Hippolytus* of ll. 732. Many expositions of the escape song exist,[21] but I take my departure from Hugh Parry's.[22] Parry establishes the inner unity of the poem by highlighting the "careful balance of imagery" that exists between the first two strophes and the final two. For example, the chorus wishes to fly over the sea (735–6), and Phaedra came from across the sea (753–4); the chorus asks Zeus to change it to a winged bird (733–4) while Phaedra's ship was winged (752), and she herself is described as a bird of ill-omen (757). The chorus longs for a place of bliss (748–51), but Phaedra sailed from a happy home (755).

Besides these verbal parallels that Parry has uncovered, we can further observe that intimations of death imbue both parts of the ode. The first strophe only on its surface is a wish for an escape to a better existence, for by the end of the strophe the chorus dwells on Phaethon, a figure who plummeted to his death. The second strophe, which describes in dreamlike terms the Hesperian coast, puts before our mind's eye that furthermost boundary of human existence, and though a place of blessedness, it is nonetheless a place without mortal existence.

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[21] For example, W. Kranz, *Stasimon. Untersuchungen zu Form und Gehalt der griechischen Tragödie* (Berlin 1933) 215, argues that the chorus frees itself and us for a moment from the heavy atmosphere before Phaedra's death. H.F. Graham, "The 'Escape' Ode in *Hippolytus*, 732–775," *CJ* 42 (1947) 275–6, calls it "a tiny island offering a moment's shelter, in a dark sea of tragedy." Barrett (above, note 2) ad loc., claims that the elaborate wish allows us to "half forget the reasons for their flight" with the result that "our mood is changed from distress to a gentle melancholy." C.P. Segal, "The Tragedy of the Hippolytus: The Waters of Ocean and the Untouched Meadow," *HSCP* 70 (1965) 117–70, demonstrates to what extent the escape song echoes or foreshadows the imagery of the play as a whole, and sees the ode as depicting the human-divine antithesis. R. Padel, "'Imagery of the Elsewhere'. Two Choral Odes of Euripides," *CQ* 24 (1974) 227–41, sees the escape-form as a reassertion of the problems of the play in a different context, and states that "even in the 'elsewhere' of lyric song the dark features that mark the drama are not to be escaped." F. Zeitlin, "The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the *Hippolytus*," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian (Durham 1985) 58ff, examines the imagery of the "knot", and notes that the escape song marks a "critical moment of reversal... the interlinking of destinies by which the unbinding of one becomes the binding of the other" (59). A.P. Burnett, "Hunt and Hearth in *Hippolytus*," in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy. Essays Presented to D.J. Conacher*, edd. M. Cropp, E. Fantham and S.E. Scully (Calgary 1986) 167–86, interprets the ode optimistically, and suggests that "while the geographical endpoint of Phaedra's journey remains Athens, while its tragical terminus is still the noose, the ethical and metaphysical 'journey's end' is now located in this *eudoxa phēmē*, the one thing to survive the catastrophic trip" (175).

[22] "The Second Stasimon of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (732–775)," *TAPA* 97 (1966) 317–26.

Parry shows that the ode moves from the general to the particular, that is, from "an escape wish of non-specific assignation to a more specific reference to the person concerned and her fate."[23] The first strophe and antistrophe mirror Phaedra's own death wish, while the second strophe and antistrophe move structurally and temporally from the death wish to the death. The ode completes the first part of the play by reflecting Phaedra's own last thoughts, in that the release wished for is death.[24]

Parry's sensitive reading of the ode, and his attempt to demonstrate its general relevance to the play, allows us to consider the important aspects of the role of Theseus and his later escape wish. When Theseus returns from Delphi (790ff) and learns of Phaedra's death, he sheds his plaited wreath (806–7) and describes her "like a bird that has vanished out of my hand," and as having "made a quick leap from me into Hades" (828–9). His words remind us of the first strophe of the great escape song, and these two sentiments frame the actual suicide of Phaedra, creating an emotional link between Phaedra's and Theseus' destructions. While the choral empathy with Phaedra produces in essence a suicide note like that in the *Women of Trachis*, Theseus' description of Phaedra sets the stage for his tragedy, because although the cause of her death is beyond his comprehension (826–7), he is already emotionally susceptible to her lie.

Phaedra, Theseus and the chorus acquire a sympathetic relationship through Phaedra's suicide, a relationship that becomes even more complex at the discovery of the written suicide note (857). The chorus, in full possession of the reasons for Phaedra's self-destruction, has been committed to silence about the scandal (711–2), and must therefore substantiate Phaedra's lie, which ensures that her tragedy will find its release in the implication of Hippolytus, and the final reconciliation of Hippolytus and Theseus.[25] Theseus now finds himself caught between Phaedra and Hippolytus, both prosaically and lyrically.

The lyric suicide note of the chorus reflects the dilemma of Phaedra's last speech, while it foreshadows the conflict of passion

[23] Ibid., 318.

[24] Ibid., 323.

[25] For interpretations of the meaning of the final reconciliation between Theseus and Hippolytus, see B.M.W. Knox, "The *Hippolytus* of Euripides," *YCS* (1952) 31; R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Hippolytus: A Study in Causation," in *Euripides. Entretiens*

and intellect evidenced by the written suicide note. The first two strophes devoted to escapist motifs represent a magical wish to be transformed, a loosening from reality and intellectual constraint. The final two strophes return to the reality of Phaedra's specific predicament. In other words, fantasy gives way to cognition, passion to intellect. The progression of the ode creates a chiasmus with the progression of Phaedra's own words in her final scene, because stating her cognitive reasons for her resolve to die first in terms of social mores, she ends on a passionate revenge thought.

Phaedra not only binds herself in the noose;[26] she also implicates Theseus and Hippolytus in her suicide by her suicide note. Theseus accords Phaedra her wish to control Hippolytus by unconditionally believing her note's claims. Only the goddess Artemis can reveal to Theseus the disastrous results of his confidence in Phaedra, and she speaks sarcastically and relentlessly (1284ff). Artemis, after accusing Theseus of murdering his son against the law of nature (1287), expresses what may well be Theseus' own thoughts, a wish for escape: why don't you in your shame (*aischthuneis*) hide your body in Tartarus under the earth. Or having exchanged your life for that of a bird will you escape this pain? (1290–3). The "double-barrelled wish"[27] here reminds us of both the choral sentiment of the opening lines of the escape song, as well as Theseus' own words upon learning of Phaedra's death. The emotional binding of Theseus and Phaedra completes itself in this climax of Theseus' tragedy. Euripides exploits dramatically the similarity between the two "suicide notes," for as

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sur l'antiquité classique VI (Geneva 1958) 191; C. Segal (above, note 21) 156; K.J. Reckford, "Phaethon, Hippolytus, and Aphrodite," *TAPA* 103 (1972) 419; D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme, and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 46; N.S. Rabinowitz, "Female Speech and Female Sexuality: Euripides' *Hippolytos* as Model," in *Rescuing Creusa. New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity*, ed., M. Skinner, *Helios* n.s. 13 (2) (1987) 128.

[26] Zeitlin (above, note 21) 58ff, has traced the imagery of binding and loosening through the play, in terms of the parallel destinies of Hippolytus and Phaedra and in terms of the very structure of the play. Specifically applied to Phaedra, however, the imagery of binding and loosening strengthens a sociological interpretation of her suicide. Eros caused her state of anomie, and anomie represents a loosening of social regulations. Phaedra refers to eros as the cause of her affliction, by which her limbs are loosened (199). In the escape song, the chorus combines the two images by remarking that Phaedra can only relieve her heart of its bitter love by binding the noose to her neck (769–75). Her overriding concern impelling her to suicide was, as I argue, her concern for reputation, her desire to remain an integral and respectable part of society, i.e., to remain bound to others. In her suicide, then, Phaedra exemplifies at once the disparate concepts of binding and loosening.

[27] Barrett (above, note 2) ad loc.

someone else in empathy articulates the desire to escape in Phaedra's case, so, too, here Artemis, not the mortal Theseus, utters the sarcastic wish. She underscores by her divinity the theme of the earlier escape song, of escapes that offer no escape. Thematically, this final "suicide note" links Theseus' emotional destruction with Phaedra's by its similarity to her lyric note, and both escape wishes form a nexus with the actual suicide note. Phaedra's escape song, sung by the chorus, precedes her suicide and the discovery of the written note, whereas Theseus' escape song, pronounced by Artemis, results directly from that written note.

Euripides has created an intricate network of "suicide notes" in the *Hippolytus*, each of which relates to the others, echoing the human problems common to Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus. For Phaedra and Hippolytus, death allows only the escape. Hippolytus goes to his death in silence about her love for him, and by that gains the good name (1299)[28] so coveted by Phaedra. Artemis reveals all and promises that Phaedra's love will not remain unsung (1430). In this play laced with both lyric and prosaic escape wishes, the interwoven fates of Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus demonstrate tragically the relentless truth that there exists *no* escape from divine anger (1326–30).

A very different Euripidean character who also seeks escape (in many ways) is Hermione in the *Andromache*. Her escape sentiment results from fear for her person rather than fear for her reputation, and her "attempted" suicide seems hysterical and theatrical. Unlike the *Hippolytus* where the relentless truth insists that *no* escape is possible, in the *Andromache* any and every kind of escape occurs, except suicide.

Andromache

The escape song of the *Andromache* occurs in the rescue portion of the play, which follows upon the suppliant action and depicts a villainess turned victim.[29] In the first movement of the play, the suppliance of Andromache, Hermione exemplifies the vicious and jealous

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[28] For an interesting discussion based on gender issues addressed in the *Hippolytus* see Rabinowitz (above, note 25).

[29] For analyses of the structure of the play see, e.g., Conacher (above, note 25)

spouse eager to retain her position as wife of Neoptolemus, while in the second movement of the play, the rescue, she seeks many ways to remove herself from that position. Both Hermione and Andromache escape their predicaments, though both drop out of consideration in the third movement, the divine retribution. Suicide attempts, lyric escape sentiments and finally an actual rescue by Orestes occupy the central scene of the play. However, escapes and rescues occupy an important place in the first action as well as the final action, and the play becomes essentially a study in escapes and the moral relativity that allows many of the characters freedom from the restraints of noble ideals.[30] In this play of near disaster, everyone escapes one way or another, except Neoptolemus, the one character who plays

166–82; A.P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived. Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal* (Oxford 1971) 130–56; and D. Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse* (Baltimore and London 1987) 45–54.

[30] The problem of dramatic unity has haunted scholarship on the play ever since the writer of the second argument apparently condemned the drama as second rate—*to de drama tōn deuterōn*. G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 198 n. 1, attempts to justify the meaning "second rate" by comparing the corresponding expression *tōn protōn* in the Greek argument to the *Hippolytus*, which is taken to mean "first rate." Most interpreters agree that instead of looking for plot unity in an Aristotelian sense, it proves more enlightening to detect underlying themes that create a thematic cohesion. Grube, 81–2, pinpoints three themes: the dynastic concerns of the house of Achilles, the evil of two wives, and most especially, the conflict between two women. Unfortunately, Grube concludes, Euripides expends too much energy on the conflict of the two women, thereby overbalancing the whole play. H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (London 1961, third edition) 230ff, accepts a composite plot that results logically from a composite wickedness and composite suffering. He finds the underlying connecting theme to be Euripides' attack on the Spartan mind. K.M. Aldrich, "The *Andromache* of Euripides," *University of Nebraska Studies* n.s. 25 (1961) 63ff, proposes that the fortunes of Andromache depicted in the beginning and recalled by Thetis at the end connect the various episodes into a single thematic structure in a sort of ring composition. The dramatic unity, he argues, revolves around the issue of war, "not with the great war of the epic legends complete with tales of battlefield derring-do and the aristeia of Homeric heroes, but rather with a senseless drawn-out melee, demeaned by the nature of its inception, sordid in its execution, and infamous in the ramifications of its results" (69). He is followed in his interpretation by P.T. Stevens, ed., *Euripides Andromache* (Oxford 1971) 13ff. Conacher (above, note 25) 175, agrees with the general scholarly consensus that the play's unity comes from a single, if impersonal, theme: namely, the final separation of good and evil elements that at the beginning were disastrously merged. In each section of the play, defeat changes to victory because of the addition of a powerful new ally. Burnett (above, note 29) 130ff, attempts to rescue the reputation of this 'deviant' play of Euripides by showing how he purposely creates chaos in the three movements with a specific end in mind, that no matter what humans may do, divine will prevails. By experimenting with "role-changing", Euripides portrays human morals and actions with a "sickening fluidity," an effect which is central to his concerns. T.B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides*, (London 1967)

no active part in the drama, yet who generates much of the action of the other players.[31] Because of his absence, Andromache's life hangs precariously and Hermione's hysteria comes to full bloom. Yet Andromache's and her son's lives are spared, and Hermione finds escape with Orestes, one of the three male characters who share Neoptolemus' husbandly duty of protection. Menelaus abandons his daughter but with impunity,[32] and Peleus will enjoy eternal peace and bliss. Euripides keeps Neoptolemus, an obviously integral character, in the background, in part, because were he present the conflict between Andromache and Hermione could be easily resolved and much of the play therefore made superfluous. Neoptolemus also represents the hero, the embodiment of martial virtue, even in his treacherous death at Delphi. This aspect of the war is not the one that Euripides wishes to stress, except insofar as it provides a contrast to the present, non-heroic and domestic situation, and this contrast Euripides accomplishes through the character of Peleus. The playwright rather seems to depict the ephemeral nature of the "glory of war," and to highlight realistically the true and ongoing horror of war and the social disruption war causes.[33] In addition, a character with no escape route is out of place in an escape play, and Neoptolemus' absence underscores the validity of the play's recurrent pattern of impending doom followed by relief. The character of Peleus functions to remind us of a former glorious situation, and the flux of his personal situation from savior to tragic victim to one who survives reflects the flux of the play.

Much of the play focuses on war and its tragic accompaniments, and Peleus, as a representative of an earlier heroic age, unsullied by

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120, emphasizes the triangle of human actors, Andromache, Hermione and Neoptolemus, which is reflected in the tripartite structure of the drama. Each main character's progression from suffering to relief parallels the same progression of the other chief characters. "Each of the chief parties has a low point marked by a lyric dialogue before relief comes: Andromache when she is led out to die, Hermione when she tries to commit suicide, Peleus when he receives Neoptolemus' body." Webster correctly underscores the relief element, which can arguably function as one of the main thematic links. I.C. Storey, "Domestic Disharmony in Euripides' *Andromache*," *G&R* 36 (1989) 16–27 highlights the theme of the disjointed *oikos*, and sees Euripides in transition from a more domestically oriented to a more politically focussed tragedy.

[31] I.J.F. de Jong, "Three Off-Stage Characters in Euripides," *Mnemosyne* 43 (1990) 10–4, examines how Euripides uses Neoptolemus as the focal point of the messenger speech at 1970ff in a way that triggers the audience's pity.

[32] Despite Kovacs' (above, note 29) 68–70, arguments to the contrary.

[33] Aldrich (above, note 30) 120ff.

a senseless war, serves as a point of contrast in the drama. The third stasimon (766–801) sings the praises of Peleus, and coming as it does between the first and second movements, draws our attention to the contrast between Peleus' background and his present circumstances. He, too, feels the effects of this depraved world, and becomes one of the most pathetic of the victims.[34] Although he has just rescued Andromache, his story with its initial blackness, the death of his grandson and subsequent promise of eternal bliss is still to come. The ode, then, rather than creating a pause with no relation to the action,[35] signals that Peleus and his heroic world are important aspects of the thrust of the play, and aids also in understanding Hermione.

The changing motion of the drama and the importance of the escape motif is pinpointed in Hermione's story since it includes many forms of escape. She will, in fact, go to any lengths to secure escape. In the first movement she seeks escape from her barrenness, for which she blames Andromache.[36] For this escape, she believes without grounds[37] that she must eliminate her competition. Because Peleus comes to rescue Andromache and Molossus, Hermione's attempt fails and she becomes hysterical, fearing for her life. The tormentor of the first movement then becomes the tormented of the second. Hermione prefers death by her hand to an encounter with Neoptolemus that might mean either her banishment or death at his hand (807–9). Since in the Greek shame-culture suicide is admirable, self-destruction is more honorable than an execution, and Euripides keeps suicide in its cultural context. Hermione, however, cannot maintain a firm ethical stance. The nurse emerges exhausted from her efforts to keep Hermione alive, tells us that Hermione, within the house and apparently remorseful, attempts suicide first by hanging and then by the sword (811–6), and is then quickly followed by a dishevelled and frantic Hermione (825ff). The nurse scarcely takes her seriously, reprimands her for immodesty (832), agrees that Hermione went too far concerning Andromache, but dismisses her fear of Neoptolemus (840). Hermione continues to look to suicide as the answer as she reprimands the nurse for preventing it (841–4). Now outside she

[34] Ibid., 75.

[35] Stevens (above, note 30) ad loc.

[36] For an analysis of the rhetorical elements in the opening agon between Hermione and Andromache, see M. Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford 1992) 51–4.

[37] For an interesting and detailed discussion of this scene see Burnett (above, note 29) 132ff.

imagines more ways of dying, by fire,[38] by leaping into the sea or from a mountain, in response to which the nurse finally suggests that what will be will be (851–2). The chorus remains silent and expresses no sympathy for Hermione.[39] This chorus, like the choruses in the *Women of Trachis* and the *Hippolytus*, might empathize with the main character by singing its own wish to escape. Instead, Hermione gives lyric expression to her pain during which she reproaches her father for abandoning her (854–6), rues her new position as suppliant (859–60), and seeks yet another kind of escape, this one magical and unattainable: would that I were a dark winged bird from the Phthian land or a pine boat that the earliest oar steered through the Kyanean sea coasts (861–5).[40]

The content of the wish is unusual, specifically the wish to become a particular ship, the Argo. However, as the traditional imagery of escape songs may change to echo or foreshadow imagery in the rest of the play, so, too, does Hermione's song. Unwittingly, Hermione, too young to have remembered the bygone heroic days, desires to return to them, implicitly recognizing that the contemporary world with its realistic moral relativity[41] compares unfavorably to a world of ideals. By wishing to become the Argo, she recalls that world of Peleus, by that creating thematic links with the previous and ensuing movements and highlighting the important of Peleus to Euripides' story.[42]

Both Hermione and Peleus will escape, the one to ignominy, the other to eternal happiness. Hermione is not a child of an heroic age, and her wish to return to it remains as empty as her suicide attempts. Unlike Phaedra consumed with fear for reputation, Hermione's

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[38] Stevens (above, note 30) ad loc., sees this as a reference to the bolt of Zeus.

[39] Grube (above, note 30) 208. See also Stevens (above, note 30) ad loc., who assigns the lines to the nurse though most manuscripts assign them to the chorus. He does so in comparison with *Hippolytus* 437–9.

[40] See Stevens (above, note 30) ad loc., for a survey of the problems and solutions offered. The text here comes from his edition. Diggle's *OCT* text at 863 reads *peukāen skaphos hāi dia* etc., which was suggested but not adopted by Stevens.

Both the form and the content of the wish are unusual. In the typical expression of the desire for wings to fly away, direction of flight is usually indicated, whereas in this instance the verb of motion for *ek gās* must be supplied from *ornis eiēn*. Emendations therefore have been suggested, for example *artheiēn* (so Stevens), but in consideration of Hermione's emotional distress and desperation, a strictly grammatical construction becomes unnecessary.

[41] Burnett (above, note 29) 145.

[42] For further points of similarity between Hermione and Peleus, see Kovacs (above, note 29) esp. 75.

opportunism outstrips any other consideration. Having sought sympathy by attempting in two ways to kill herself, attempts that were received in silence by the chorus and scorned by the nurse, she ventures a second time to gain sympathy by a "suicide note," her escape song. This, too, fails to achieve its goals, and the nurse sends her like a spoiled child back into the house (866ff). The nurse reminds Hermione that her actions can only hurt her reputation (877), but her reprimand matters little: when Orestes arrives, Hermione abandons all dignity, and the two less than admirable players leave behind all moral concerns. With this escape that has been "deprived of all claim to the sublime . . . the poet forces a temporary cynicism upon his audience, urging them to think that virtue is only a tragedian's dream, while this present meanness is the daylight view of things."[43]

Hermione's suicide attempts may or may not have been sincere, but they certainly reflect the fluidity and flexibility of her thoughts. Still, her quick abandonment of the idea when a new opportunity for escape in the person of Orestes presents itself shows her as all too human, all too ready to live with whatever moral adjustments are necessary. Her comfort results from the fact that she feels herself only partly responsible for her actions; Neoptolemus and the gods are the other responsible parties (902-3). No noble social motivations of the sort Andromache felt at the beginning of the play, when she was altruistically ready to give her life for her son's, spurred Hermione to her actions. Concern for reputation and shame, the forces that were so dominant in Phaedra's tragedy and impelled her to a resolute suicide, fails to touch Hermione at all. Certainly, Hermione's concerns center on herself, and her tendencies toward self-indulgence and insecurity deserve remark, caused in part by the disintegration of her accustomed world in which *nomos* rules marriage (176–8). Yet, unlike Ajax whose suicide resulted from an isolation from his social milieu, Hermione's tendencies very much exemplify the unheroic contemporary society Euripides portrays in the *Andromache*. Unlike Antigone, whose self-centered tendencies create a paradox with her altruistic notions, Hermione exhibits no such mitigating aspects. Her only driving force is her wish to escape, not from a society that has treated her unjustly, but from a situation unfavorable to her yet created solely by her. Unlike Heracles, who considered suicide not only to

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[43] Burnett (above, note 29) 144–5.

escape further suffering but also to save himself and others from further disgrace, Hermione attempted suicide merely to escape future suffering. Both Plato and Aristotle would have occasion to condemn this type of cowardly suicide. Tragic suicide always is resolute, noble, socially motivated and therefore understandable and pardonable. Hermione's attempts prove indecisive in their failure, ignoble in their conception and psychologically motivated only. In the person of Hermione and her failed attempts to kill herself compared to Andromache's motivations to self-sacrifice, Euripides permits us to examine the true nature of tragic suicide.

Hecuba

The *Hecuba* provides a fitting conclusion for a chapter in which we have discovered a close connection between the lyric wish to escape, a musical "suicide note," and suicide, for in this drama the chorus itself remarks on the bond.[44] Hecuba finds herself in sociological terms in complete anomie and so acts with a total disregard for society's rules and expectations. In this anomic state, she commits horrendous and vengeful acts against Polymestor, the character in this tragedy who sings of escape. When he emerges from the tent blinded (1056ff), Polymestor wants personal revenge on the Trojan women, but checks himself from that pursuit when he recalls his abandoned children (1075). On his second departure from the tent laden with his dead sons, he begs unsuccessfully for help from the Achaeans (1087ff). His only remaining hope resides in escape: "Where am I to turn? Where can I go? Flying away will I, the wretch, leap into the soaring heavenly palace, where Orion or Sirius send forth the gleaming flares of fire from their eyes, or into the swarthy strait of Hades?" (1099–1106).

This escape song elaborates and specifies where Polymestor would go either above or below the earth. Should he grow wings, he would fly specifically to Orion and Sirius. Late myths concerning Orion present a confusing picture,[45] but the earliest mention of him occurs

[44] For a discussion of the voluntary self-sacrifice of Polyxena, see my chapter five, and the bibliography there cited.

[45] For the collection of ancient sources and a discussion of their problematic nature, see H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London 1928) 115–7 and 131, nn. 53–8.

in the *Odyssey* V.121–4, where Artemis slew him with her "soothing shafts." Orion's companion, Sirius the dog star, symbolizes the hot mid-summer season when grapes are plucked from their vines (Hesiod *Works* 609). Polymestor, then, seems to pray for release by death. His alternative want, to plunge beneath the earth, is similarly lethal. To go beneath the world means to enter the realm of Hades, i.e., to die. Both expressions are active, that is, Polymestor wishes to control his fate, not merely be manipulated by it, and only suicide can provide this sort of escape. Death by suicide, however, is not the answer for Polymestor, for he, like Hermione, lacks acceptable reasons for it, nor has Euripides developed his character in such a way to evoke pity. He has, as it were, brought his punishment on himself by neglecting his role as *xenos* to the Trojans, and by his self-aggrandizement that he claims to have been a help to the Greeks.[46] Nonetheless, his "note" occasions a choral comment on suicide: "Ending a wretched life is pardonable when someone suffers more evils (*kaka*) than are endurable" (1107–8).

The comment underscores the argument here that "escape songs" reveal suicidal thoughts, and more importantly, it concisely sums up the nature of tragic suicide. Endurance on occasion may be the proper response, but if endurance fails, then suicide, simultaneously pardonable and understandable, needs only the appropriate *kaka* to justify it. Ethical or physical considerations define the *kaka*: loss of good reputation, illicit passions, loss of physical powers or loss of control and freedom. Deianeira succumbed to the disintegration of her private, female world of silence, and to ensure her society's continuation for noble reasons killed herself, while Hermione, failing to respond to social considerations of reputation, lived on in a state of disgrace. Aeschylus' Suppliants and Phaedra felt conflicting social pressures. The Danaids, uncertain of their position in Argos, acted freely, disregarding any regulations, and so insisted on self-reliance. Phaedra's situation arose from a too severe external need for societal approval, which conflicted with an internal unleashed desire.

At a critical point in each character's story, an escape song functioned to express his or her suicidal tendencies, sometimes replacing the suicide, sometimes establishing empathy between the chorus and the actual suicide victim. By establishing an empathy, the playwrights

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[46] A.W.H. Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* n.s. 16 (1966) 204.

reveal the essence of tragic suicide: in its social and ethical motivations, it is understandable; in social and ethical ramifications, pardonable. In the dramaturgy of the plays, noble and resolute characters committed to upholding social ideals commit suicide; ignoble or irresolute characters live on. Tragic suicide, then, becomes the human answer to perversity in the world and to fluctuating morals, a means by which humans assert their humanity and differentiate themselves from divinity by asserting their freedom of choice between life and death, an option not available to the gods.

CHAPTER FOUR

"GROANING TEARS": SUICIDE FROM GRIEF

For dying will free one from lamentable evils.
Aesch. *Suppliant Maidens* 802–3

The *kaka* that precipitate suicide include grief caused by bereavement. Even though in early Greek thought death is accepted as an inescapable part of the cosmic cycle and of the community, the death ritual encompasses the values and attitudes associated with separation,[1] values familiar in Greek tragedy. The sociological responses of grief, trauma, disorder, or pollution find articulation in the self-defilement and/or self-wounding of the survivors. Generally, the outpouring of grief creates a bridge from bereavement to reintegration, and is expressed at funerals to allow the survivors to externalize and cope with the pain of separation so that normal life may resume. Public display of grief creates a communal solidarity and allows for the reinstatement of the order disrupted by death through an acceptance of the death. As societies become more complex and their intellectual thought more developed, a more individual attitude towards death manifests itself, and the concept of pollution becomes more pronounced, reflecting the increased fear of death.[2] The specific *kakon* at issue here is the change in one's position in society, either in terms of family relationships or between the individual and the state. Suicide victims are not condemned for succumbing to their grief, nor are they characterized as cowardly. Rather the *kaka* that lead them to self-destruction may also help define their *physis*, and give new definition to their position in society that has, at least in their own eyes, become untenable because of their loss.

Poignant distress over death-separation prevents Eurydice and Haemon in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Jocasta in Euripides' *Phoenician Women* and Evadne in his *Suppliant Women* from acceptance of the death of

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[1] C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "To Die and Enter the House of Hades: Homer, Before and After," in *Mirrors of Mortality. Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. J. Whaley (London 1981) 15–39.

[2] Ibid., 38–9.

a loved one, and as a result, unable to reintegrate themselves into their cultures, they kill themselves. Jocasta in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* suffers from a different kind of *kakon*, from skepticism and from a too-clear understanding of the horrors of incest. *Kakon* in the Homeric epics has no moral connotation, but refers simply to something that is harmful, regardless of whether the harmful thing is right or wrong.[3] However, in the fifth century the word acquires a moral sense, and in a political context, the *kaka* include "injustice, impiety, and in short everything which is opposed to political *aretē*."[4] *Oedipus the King* in many ways presents a sustained examination of impiety,[5] especially through Jocasta's skepticism.

Oedipus the King

The *Oedipus the King* in several ways contrasts with the *Women of Trachis*. The latter focusses on two heroes,[6] the former on one. The *Women of Trachis* portrays primarily silence and deception, while the *OT*, despite temporary or attempted silence, reveals and uncovers. Jocasta's and Deianeira's final silent exits technically resemble each other, but the motivations and contexts diverge suggestively. Given the essentially equivalent societies to which Deianeira and Jocasta belong, a comparison in ethical terms of their motivations to suicide is interesting. Both necessarily react individually to their society, but to different aspects of it. Deianeira has lived a highly regulated life, in the care first of her father and then of her husband, and commits suicide because the world in which she is comfortable has been shattered. Bereft of all control, she lapses into a state of confusion and

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[3] A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960) 31. See also his chapter 9 for a discussion of *kakos* acquiring a moral component.

[4] Plato, *Protagoras* 323D6.

[5] As R. Minadeo, "Plot and Theme in 'Oedipus the King'," *La parola del passato* 45 (1990) 241–76, says in the context of Oedipus' fate according to Delphi: "The choice was entirely his [Oedipus'], and he took the way of impiety" (242).

[6] The problem of a single hero or two heroes in some of Sophocles' plays has given rise to a number of scholarly positions, the most rigid from B.M.W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) passim. I find persuasive R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980), who accepts the possibility of a dual focus in the *Trachiniae* (chapter 4), and in the *Antigone* (chapter 6). See also J. Hogan, "The Protagonists of the *Antigone*," *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 93–100, for a review of opinions on this issue in the *Antigone*. In the *OT* the question does not arise.

commits suicide. Jocasta lives a more socially integrated life, assuming joint rulership with her husband, but her network of *philia* becomes threatened and fragile because of her exaggerated self-reliance and skepticism. From her skepticism she gains a composure, a skepticism that sets her apart, individualizes her. This composure becomes disillusioned by the facts, and these awful facts are part of a world into which she now refuses to be integrated. Thus she commits suicide to relieve her grief and to curse powerfully Laius and her marriage bed (1242–50).[7]

Jocasta primarily plays the role of skeptic,[8] but a certain degree of skepticism also attends Oedipus in his process toward discovery,[9] and at the moment Oedipus comes to understanding of every detail of his crimes he also becomes an ardent believer in the power of fate,

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[7] A.J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (Routledge 1990) 145, calls Jocasta the "purest example of female shame-suicide in tragedy, the female counterpart of Ajax."

[8] Winnington-Ingram (above, note 6) 178–84.

[9] A discussion of any part of the *OT* must begin from an attempt to understand the whole, and certain large-scale questions have been asked repeatedly and answered in various ways. For example, what is *hamartia*, and does Oedipus display it? Is it a character flaw such as quickness to anger or hybris, or rather a deficiency in knowledge? Much recent criticism tends toward the second explanation, for what is tragic about "just desserts" See, for example, T. Gould, "The Innocence of Oedipus: The Philosophers on *Oedipus the King*," *Arion* 4 (1965) 363–86; 582–611; 5 (1966) 478–525; or the most lucid and convincing argument of E.R. Dodds, "On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*," *G&R* 13 (1966) 37–49; repr. in his *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford 1973) 64–77. But if Oedipus does not receive punishment for a moral defect, why must he endure such suffering? Is he simply caught up in fate, or does he in fact have choices to make? For arguments against the "tragedy of fate" interpretation, see e.g., J.C. Kamerbeek, *Commentaries. IV. Oedipus Tyrannus* (Leiden 1967) 25: "... it seems permissible to regard the tragedy of Oedipus ... as an exemplification ... of human greatness holding its own against all Fate can do," and claims that the action of the play conveys "the tragic unveiling of a reality from the shrouds of human delusion, the delusiveness of human good fortune, the frailty of human inferences in contrast with divine truth." See also B.M.W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven 1957) 3ff; and K. Reinhardt, *Sophocles* (Oxford 1979) 98: the *OT* is not *the* tragedy of human fate, but *the* tragedy of human illusion. Winnington-Ingram (above, note 6) 173, suggests that the play examines the "breach between the divine and human modes of existence, the frailty of man and his exposure to the power of the gods." M.J. O'Brien [ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Oedipus Rex* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1968) 8–10] proposes that the only quality of Oedipus that becomes a major issue is his intelligence. "Man matches wits with the gods." For G.H. Gellie, *Sophocles: A Reading* (Melbourne 1972) 104–5 and 204–5, the crux of the play is discovery, and whether Oedipus is good or bad becomes a non-question. Truth exists in and of itself, and Truth, in the guise of Apollo, destroys Oedipus. One could list different opinions ad infinitum, [for an extensive bibliography, see H. Friis Johansen in *Lustrum* 7 (1962) 94–342, who surveys scholarship from 1939 to 1959; and the supplemental bibliography by H. Diller, *Sophokles* (Darmstadt 1967)

chance and the gods.[10] Concurrently with belief arises the sense of the futility of human endeavor in the wake of divine control. Both Jocasta and Oedipus become believers, but each reacts differently. Jocasta sees no way of integration into a world seemingly at random but in fact quite well-ordered and so commits suicide. Oedipus, however, at the end of the play, after he has gone from the pinnacle of human greatness to the pit of human degradation,[11] can and does reintegrate himself into a newly understood order. Jocasta plays a significant role in Oedipus' story, and the two can only be understood in respect to each other, in particular in their degree of skepticism. To reveal Jocasta's motivations to suicide as depicted by the playwright, it is necessary to trace the themes of belief and skepticism in the play as a whole to stress the significance of these themes in Oedipus' story, and to demonstrate how Jocasta's suicide results directly from her vacillating nature, which Sophocles depicts in terms of alternating belief and disbelief.

Oedipus at the outset of the play presents a figure as pious and fortunate as can be. He expresses his faith and belief in oracles by sending Creon to Apollo for information (70–3). When Creon returns and relates Apollo's injunctions, Oedipus automatically accepts them and asks only procedural questions (99). Because Apollo did not tell Creon who the miasma was, Oedipus sends for Teiresias. The chorus, having already anxiously questioned the nature of prophecy and oracular response, but having established in the parodos

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537–46. See also D.A. Hester, "Oedipus and Jonah," *PCPS* 23 (1977) 32–61], but I take my departure in this discussion from R.D. Dawe [ed., *Sophocles' Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge 1982) introduction] who examines, albeit unorthodoxically, the role of "conventional piety" manifest in the drama by referring to Oedipus' self-defence in the *Oedipus at Colonus* (962ff). In that defence Oedipus, as it were, condemns the cruelty of fate. Regarding conventional piety in the *OT*, Dawe, p. 5, suggests that

> outright condemnation of fate or the gods is not something to be expected of a playwright competing in a religious festival. But Sophocles' chorus and characters are studiously silent when it comes to any actual defence, or even explanation . . . of the workings of fate or heaven. The horror and sympathy they express for the human victim must imply a compensatory, if unspoken, verdict against those forces that permit, or cause, such things to happen.

However, such a verdict, if indeed it exists, only issues from a *belief* in those forces, and this belief is far from secure in the *OT*.

[10] For the importance of the notion of "chance" in the *OT*, see Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (above, note 9) 176ff.

[11] See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*," in *Greek Tragedy. Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. E. Segal (New York 1983) 189–209.

that it nonetheless believes and reveres the power of the gods,[12] now recommends Teiresias and actually equates him with Apollo himself (284–6). Oedipus initially shares the chorus' confidence in Teiresias, and when he arrives, Oedipus lavishes praise on him for his knowledge (300–1). Teiresias is the city's only champion (303–4) and Oedipus, expressing his utmost belief in prophecy, beseeches him to use his skill to save all (310–2). When at 353 Teiresias says very clearly that Oedipus is the land's pollution, Oedipus begins to disbelieve (reasonably enough), and disparages the seer's profession (357). Soon he even refuses to listen (365). Disbelief, not only anger, underlies his words.[13] In the ensuing conversation, Oedipus will blame anyone rather than believe in his guilt. He accuses Teiresias of a conspiracy with Creon, and he chides him for his inability to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, concluding that though it required a prophet, Teiresias lacked the ability to interpret omens from birds and knowledge from the gods (394–6). He, on the other hand, solved the riddle because his knowledge did not come from birds (398). Oedipus, despite his prior acceptance of the efficacy of the gift of prophecy, has now completely denied its utility.[14] Whether or not Oedipus leaves the stage at 446 before Teiresias has revealed his part in the crimes,[15] he has at least heard the broad outline of his tragedy. He has not, however, accepted it. The rest of the play moves toward that inevitable admission.

The first stasimon (461–511) comments on the preceding episode, juxtaposing the sense of urgency with a growing disbelief, and the chorus realizes that Teiresias has spread terrible confusion (483–4).[16] It wavers on whether to believe him or not (485), because its loyalty

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[12] C.P Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus. A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City 1987) 98. And cf. R.W.B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980) 142–8, who notes that a "sincere and deeply felt belief in the gods is apparent throughout the whole of the parodos" (146).

[13] So Kamerbeek, *OT* (above, note 9) 16, "The truth is out but is not believed, either by Oedipus or by the Chorus . . ."; and Gellie (above, note 9) 85.

[14] R.W. Bushnell, *Prophesying Tragedy. Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Ithaca and London 1988) 67–85, discusses the conflict between Apollo's "signs," which may be silent and ambiguous but which are nonetheless always right, and Oedipus' voice, which expresses itself freely and which becomes his defiance of prophecy. Teiresias' arrival initiates this conflict. The fulfillment of the oracles also represents an order that Oedipus seems to threaten.

[15] For a persuasive argument in support of this stage action, see B.M.W. Knox, "Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* 446: Exit Oedipus?" *GRBS* 21 (1980) 321–32. But cf. O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978) 43–4.

[16] For a sensitive reading of this ode, see Burton (above, note 12) 148–52.

to Oedipus requires a clearer proof of his guilt, a proof beyond doubt. The chorus at this point at least is ready to believe in the man Oedipus at the risk of giving up its belief in prophecy previously stated at 284–6.

Creon returns, but the mood of Oedipus has changed considerably since their first interview. Oedipus flatly accuses him of conspiracy, and though Creon answers each charge logically and clearly, to Oedipus in his state of disbelief no logic appeals. The most intelligent and logical of mortals turns a deaf ear to probability. Creon finally remarks that Oedipus speaks as one who will neither yield nor believe (625).[17]

Jocasta enters this atmosphere of growing disbelief and extends Oedipus' specific mistrust of Teiresias' skill to a general disbelief in prophecy. To allay Oedipus' fears she bids him not to be concerned about the affair, but to listen to her and learn that no human excels in the craft of prophecy (707–10). She offers as proof, unfortunately, a terrible example, because it sets Oedipus to thinking about the crossroads.[18] From her example, however, Jocasta concludes that oracles are clearly false and enjoins Oedipus to pay them no heed (723–4). Oedipus' one shred of hope for his innocence comes from Jocasta's reference to more than one robber (715), to which he will cling for as long as possible. Jocasta, however, continues to insist that prophecy is false, vowing never to look to it again (857–8), a sentiment with which Oedipus appears to agree (*kalôs nomizei* 859).

The second stasimon (863–910), the ode of piety,[19] begins, as the first stasimon did, on a note of certainty and piety, but ends on a less than pious note. In effect, in the final antistrophe the chorus threatens to cast off religious beliefs. It wishes to believe in oracles

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[17] Pearson in the *OCT*, following the codices, attributes this line to Oedipus. Dawe, however, accepting Haase's correction, attributes it to Creon.

See Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (above, note 9) 78ff, for the aspects of a legal investigation here and throughout the play.

[18] Although in the face of her reference to pierced ankles (718) he seems to "suffer from dramatically convenient transitory amnesia," Dawe (above, note 9) 200.

[19] Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (above, note 9) 154, interprets the ode as a statement by the chorus that it can no longer agree with Jocasta's and Oedipus' view of oracles. "But they have gone too far for the chorus, which now abandons Oedipus and turns instead to those 'high-footed laws which are the children of Olympus and not a creation of mortal man.' The chorus calls on Zeus to fulfil the oracles . . .". But cf. Winnington-Ingram (above, note 6) 185–204, for a detailed analysis of the ode. He interprets the last stanza as expressing "not so much their disapproval of Jocasta's skepticism as their distress of mind at the evidence which seems to justify it" (201). C. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951) 143–5,

and the religious practices associated with them, but it, like Jocasta and Oedipus, is skeptical:[20] "No longer will I go in reverence to the untouched navel of the earth or Abae or Olympia, if these manifest affairs will not fit all mortals" (897–902). By the end of the ode, the chorus is even more explicit: "Perishing and old oracles about Laius now are removed, and Apollo is no longer revealed by honors. Religious affairs are tottering" (906–10). The bold tone of skepticism, or at least of the anxiety that the evidence seems to justify a skepticism,[21] of the chorus and the previously displayed skepticism of Jocasta provide a sharp foil for Jocasta's next action,[22] while the heavy irony in the ode also prepares us for it.[23] She appears carrying garlands as a suppliant to Lycaean Apollo, praying for a *lusis*, a release, from the curse (911–21). Apparently her adamantine skepticism has not accomplished for Oedipus what she had hoped, and now she reverts to traditional beliefs and practices.[24] In other words, she vacillates, moving from confident denial of Apollo's oracles to supplication and acceptance of Apollo's very powers. Ironically, her prayer is answered in a way that convinces her that her skepticism is, after all, well founded. If Polybus is dead (943), then Oedipus could not have

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points out that the second stasimon expresses more doubt than faith, and is followed in this by R. Scodel, "Hybris in the Second Stasimon of the *Oedipus Rex*," *CP* 77 (1982) 214–23. For other interpretations of the ode see, e.g., Burton (above, note 12) 156–70, esp. 157: "They retire to some distance from the action . . . so that in their state of apprehension they may remind themselves and the audience of the laws of heaven, the majesty of god, and the facts of sin and punishment. They are trying to re-establish confidence in traditional beliefs and principles which have been threatened within the play, and they are also seeking a solution to the agony of doubt expressed in the last two stanzas of the previous ode." Or Gardiner (above, note 12) 103–6, esp. 105: "These practical men are not foolishly praying that Zeus will make oracles of the past come true, but rather than he will restore the gods' credibility by preventing the utterance of false oracles in the future."

[20] Burton (above, note 12) 156, argues that at this point Oedipus has displayed no degree of skepticism, and so the "immediate cause of the ode lies in Jocasta's attack on the art of prophecy . . .". However, Oedipus has in effect agreed, at least by 859, with Jocasta.

[21] Winnington-Ingram (above, note 6) 201.

[22] Dawe (above, note 9) 187. See also Kamerbeek, *OT* (above, note 9) 21, "Perhaps no detail of the tragedy is more expressive of the chasm between inexorable divine will and human futility."

[23] See Scodel, "Hybris" (above, note 19) esp. 223, for the ironies in the ode. Lines 903–5 are a case-in-point because within this generally skeptical ode, the chorus itself seems to waver by seeming in these three lines to disapprove of skepticism.

[24] Gellie (above, note 9) 95, sees this vacillation as required by the plot, but her suicide becomes clearer if it has been prepared for, as it were, by her character in action. See also Reinhardt (above, note 9) 116ff, who successfully dismisses notions of Jocasta's "levity."

killed his father. The oracles are proved absolutely and irretrievably false: "O oracles of the Gods, where are you now?" (946–7). If there had been any doubt about Oedipus' former skepticism, now he joins wholeheartedly in her disbelief: "Polybus is dead, and he took with him the worthless oracles" (971–2). Jocasta subordinates all notions of divine control to random chance (*eikē* 977).

The messenger shatters this sense of security they have found in their disbelief in order, and Jocasta, more willing to believe *or* disbelieve than Oedipus, understands the import of the news before Oedipus. Perhaps by 1056f ("don't pay attention, and don't bring to mind things said in vain"), certainly by 1060f ("don't, by the gods, search this out if you care about your own life. I am suffering enough"), Jocasta knows all.[25] Oedipus cannot be dissuaded from insisting on understanding everything. Jocasta, in despair, speaks her last words to him: "alas, you unhappy man. I can call you only this, and nothing else ever" (1071–2). The chorus instantly reacts, describing and commenting upon her exit: "why ever has the woman gone, Oedipus, rushing off in wild grief? I fear that something bad (*kaka*) may erupt from this silence" (1073–5). "Sophocles can only by special pleading be acquitted of the charge of using here a piece of dramatic technique not appropriate to the situation."[26] Dawe makes this perhaps too strong accusation in the context of the other two Sophoclean examples of women who exit silently and commit suicide, Deianeira in the *Women of Trachis* and Eurydice in the *Antigone*. But a comparison of Jocasta with these women, particularly Deianeira, is most informative. Jocasta's "silence" differs significantly from Deianeira's, as her role has differed considerably from Deianeira's. Deianeira, usually requiring prodding, acted cautiously, believing and trusting in everyone. Silence formed an integral part of her nature, and her silent exit, therefore, is altogether apt. Jocasta, on the other hand, disbelieves readily and is comfortable taking part in the virile realm of action as a co-ruler with Oedipus (579, 581).[27] Sophocles has not lavished "silence" imagery on her; quite the contrary. She

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[25] For the impact of the issue of incest on the play and the audience, see N. Loraux, "L'Empreinte de Jocaste," *L'Ecrit du temps* 12 (1986) 35–54.

[26] Dawe (above, note 9) 203.

[27] N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster, (Cambridge, Mass. 1987) 21–2, claims that Deianeira, Eurydice and Jocasta are similar in their discomfort in the public realm. But there is no hint that Jocasta is unaccustomed to taking part in the male world of action.

articulates most clearly and truculently her skepticism as well as the latent skepticism of Oedipus. Deianeira, appropriately, "crept away in silence," while Jocasta "rushed away in grief." Surely Sophocles means the choral comment on silence to refer not to her manner of exit, which is decidedly not silent,[28] but to Jocasta's own final words, her declaration that she will speak no more. The chorus recognizes that it is uncharacteristic of Jocasta to suggest that she will speak to Oedipus no longer, and so it fears her threat of future silence. It also ominously suggests that intense grief may provoke further *kaka*, in this case suicide, although the chorus does not at this point know that Jocasta has gone to kill herself.

Oedipus persists in his disbelief much longer than Jocasta, but inevitably comes to the same realization. His cry of comprehension echoes hers: "O, alas, all becomes clear!" (1182). He takes his leave of the sun (1183), which apparently the chorus understands as a suicide threat,[29] since the fourth stasimon assumes the form of a lament.[30] The chorus contrasts the past and the present of Oedipus' fate, from which it draws a pessimistic conclusion for the whole human race: life is futile (1186–8). Ironically, the chorus sings this dirge of lamentation (1220ff) for Oedipus, although Jocasta, not Oedipus, proves the actual suicide victim. A second messenger relates the event to the chorus: Jocasta is dead (1234–5).

Sophocles uses the same pattern, i.e., silent exit-dirge-messenger description, in the *OT* that he had employed in the *Women of Trachis*, but with important differences, and again a comparison of the similar actions is revealing. The story of Deianeira's suicide has to be cajoled from the nurse; Jocasta's suicide receives brutally short shrift. This anonymous eye-witness messenger quickly describes her prelude to suicide. Unlike Deianeira, who takes her farewell from her house before she approaches her bed and who blames only herself for the tragic events, Jocasta proceeds directly to her marriage bed (1244) and curses it (1249), apparently shifting the blame to external agents.

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[28] Dawe's suggestion (above, note 9) 204, that her last couplet may be an aside does not solve the problem. Deianeira and, as we shall see, Eurydice exit silently after a long silence of listening. Jocasta, on the other hand, has been engaged in dialogue all the way up to the moment of her final exit.

[29] Suicide threats and, by extension, mistakenly assumed suicide threats form another category of analysis not undertaken in this study in detail, but which I hope to pursue in another context.

[30] M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974) 165. See also Burton (above, note 12) 172–9.

Deianeira's meandering to suicide harmonizes perfectly with her general hesitancy toward any action. Jocasta's more direct and self-sufficient approach to life in general as exemplified by her reliance on her knowledge instead of on oracles manifests itself also in her quick and determined suicide. In neither play does the eye-witness actually witness the act of suicide. Oedipus distracts the messenger (1253), whereas the nurse tries to secure help to stop Deianeira. In the *OT*, Sophocles uses this device of distraction to return our attention to Oedipus, the central figure of the drama. The chorus makes no further comment on Jocasta's death, nor does it sing a dirge for her, for the horror of Oedipus' appearance overwhelms it. Jocasta is forgotten for some 200 lines until Oedipus, after his anger has subsided, remembers her and bids Creon give her proper burial (1446ff). In the *Women of Trachis*, Sophocles employs the distraction device to sharpen our pity for Deianeira, because by involving Hyllus and the chorus, the nurse helps to keep Deianeira in her central place in the play; in the *OT* he skillfully reiterates Jocasta's subordinate but extremely important causal connection to Oedipus' story.

Jocasta hangs herself (1264); Deianeira stabs herself. Deianeira stabs herself in imitation of a sexual encounter with Heracles, trying to reestablish that equilibrium of control so necessary to her existence. To Jocasta, nothing could be more repugnant than her sexual encounters, first with Laius, then with Oedipus, and in her manner of death, hanging, Sophocles seems to follow Homeric precedent (*Od.* 11.271ff), attaching no further significance to the method.[31]

Oedipus, like Heracles, wishes to kill his wife (1255–9). Unlike Heracles who never relented toward Deianeira, Oedipus turns his anger against himself when he discovers Jocasta (1263ff). In the former play, Sophocles creates even more pity for Deianeira by reminding us, even after her death, that she and Heracles react in opposite ways to the same stimuli. In the *OT*, Sophocles creates a turning point in Oedipus' progress by Jocasta's death, because once she has died and has by that removed any external object of blame, Oedipus recoils onto himself. Significantly, a divine aura surrounds the

[31] Loraux (above, note 27) 13ff, argues that because virgins primarily hang themselves, hanging should be associated with marriage. On the other hand, bloody suicide is associated with maternity. Therefore, Sophocles emphasizes Jocasta as a spouse, whereas Euripides in his *Phoenissae* underscores her role as mother. Deianeira, however, expresses no remorse for her motherhood, and Jocasta is far from virginal. For the ancient attitude toward hanging, see van Hooff (above, note 7) 64ff.

critical moment (1258–60).[32] In a sense, the "divine revelation" to Oedipus of Jocasta's suicide foreshadows the "sightless" Oedipus who needs guiding and who gains through his self-blinding a more encompassing vision of human life.

By the end of his play Oedipus has reasserted himself as a traditional believer, an event not overlooked by Creon: "Now even you will trust the God" (1445). Oedipus realizes his fate-determined destiny (1458), and by his self-blinding expresses his awareness of the futility of human knowledge, and his ability to reintegrate himself into society, that is to say, to continue to live (1456), even if on decidedly different terms.[33] The heavy tragic irony of Oedipus' inability to see while sighted has been pointed out relentlessly,[34] but his continued existence shows exactly how ephemeral is the illusion of control grounded in human knowledge, and how futile. One must live in full awareness of one's humanness and therefore of one's limited knowledge.

Jocasta seeks a different solution to her problem, a solution deemed appropriate by the chorus for Oedipus, at least (1367–8). She is Sophocles' clearest questioner of traditional beliefs. Though Oedipus and the chorus also wavered in their beliefs, Jocasta tottered precipitously. Her suicide is in no way presented as cowardly, nor as a surrogate for that of Oedipus. Oedipus, as king, condemned the creator of the miasma to exile, not death.[35] Oedipus, as criminal, fulfills the orders of the king, and allows himself to assume a new role as a poor yet powerful beggar. Suicide, therefore, could provide no release for him. Jocasta's story is important by itself to the dramaturgy and

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[32] E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 68, describes how Greeks often ascribe actions done in frenzy or by intuition to a daimon. B. Frank, "Sophocles' OEDIPUS THE KING," *Explicator* 51 (1992) 5–6, suggests that the hanged Jocasta becomes the dead infant that Oedipus should have been, and Oedipus by cutting the cord as it were delivers the child. The brooches become Jocasta's "phalluses."

[33] See Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (above, note 9) 185ff, for the similarity of the character of Oedipus at the end of the play and at the beginning.

[34] See, e.g., W.C. Helmbold, "The Paradox of the *Oedipus*," *AJP* 72 (1951) 293–300, esp. 298; H. Musurillo, S.J., "Sunken Imagery in Sophocles' *Oedipus*," *AJP* 78 (1957) 36–51; P.W. Harsh, "Implicit and Explicit in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*," *AJP* 79 (1958) 243–58; R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (Baltimore 1958) 85–6, 89ff; R.G.A. Buxton, "Blindness and Limits: Sophokles and the Logic of Myth," *JHS* 100 (1980) 22–37.

[35] But, in fact, he is denied either possibility, and is instead sent back into the house. See Taplin (above, note 15) 46. Minadeo (above, note 5) 274, suggests that Oedipus' altruism precludes suicide because it "suggests an equation in Sophocles between the courage to endure and the humane resources of heart."

the meaning of the play, and her suicide is, in social terms, a logical conclusion to her personal tragedy.

Antigone

Three suicides occur in the *Antigone*. Antigone's death will be discussed in chapter five along with other altruistically motivated suicides. The other two suicides, those of Haemon and Eurydice, are precipitated by extreme grief, but each of which is thought-provoking in light of fifth-century values of the relationship between family members, between religion and state, and between males and females. Haemon is one of the most interesting and complex suicides in Greek tragedy. Sophocles develops his character as a dutiful son and a loyal friend who becomes the spokesperson for the people of Thebes. When he commits suicide, he is tortured by grief and anger, and feels hopelessness not only for his individual fate but also for his family's and city's future. Eurydice's concerns are primarily with the *oikos*. All the suicides in the *Antigone* reaffirm important institutions and belief in them.

Ismene first introduces Haemon (568) when she tries to convince Creon not to kill Antigone. She appeals to Creon's role as father, but Creon disregards Haemon's feelings and his betrothal. When the chorus announces Haemon's arrival (628), they suggest he comes in grief (*achnumenos*) at his lost marriage, while Creon fears he comes in anger (*lussainon* 633). In psychological terms grief often manifests itself as anger. Haemon diplomatically sets him at ease, and gingerly tries to warn Creon of the Theban reaction to his punishment of Antigone.[36] He appeals to Creon to give up his anger, and to learn from others who speak good sense (720ff). Hot-headed Creon embarks on a sarcastic dialogue with Haemon in which he refuses to listen to anyone, whether women, townsfolk or family. Haemon retaliates in anger, threatens to kill himself (751), and stalks off (762ff),

[36] Although, as P.E. Easterling, "Constructing Character in Greek Tragedy," in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. C. Pelling (Oxford 1990) 83–99 points out, Haemon's position as spokesman is diminished somewhat by his bias in favor of Antigone. "We can't rule out the possibility that what he offers as a report of public opinion is his own construction designed to influence Creon" (98). C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' *Antigone*," *JHS* 109 (1989) 134–48, takes a more negative view of Haemon and concludes that in the context of the fifth-century Athenian polis, the Haemon-

assuring Creon he will never see him again. The whole scene between Creon and Haemon has been building up to a crescendo of anger. Each of them becomes more and more passionate in their position, until they hurl such devastating insults at each other that they must part company. The chorus comments upon how Haemon has left quickly in anger and with a deeply grieving mind (766–7), by that calling our attention to the psychological connection between these two emotions.

But they do meet again, at the side of Antigone's corpse, and anger and grief still impel Haemon to his acts. Teiresias has predicted the death of Haemon, though not specifically death by suicide (1065ff), and Creon relents. The messenger recounts the events: "Haemon is gone. One of his kin drew blood" (1174). To the chorus' query about who the perpetrator was, the messenger responds "he killed himself. His blood is on his father" (1177). Soon, in the presence of Eurydice, the messenger gives details of the event. Creon, upon hearing his son crying, orders his men to open the cave. Inside Haemon mourns and clings to Antigone, and when Creon begs him to emerge, Haemon glowers and spits at him (1231f). Haemon attacks Creon, but misses. "Then the unhappy boy, in anger at himself, leant on the blade (1234–5), and while dying, grasped and held Antigone."

Haemon's world no longer exists. Confronted by an inflexible father and by the loss of his betrothed, he first attempts to rid himself of the pain by killing the responsible party. Clearly in Greek society the father-son relationship is extremely significant, and often the relationship works itself out through conflict and hostility. Haemon vents his anger externally, but when the murder fails, he turns the anger inward, perhaps at shame for having attempted to kill his father, and kills himself.[37] Unable to cope with the loss of the two most important relationships of a young man's life, father-son and hus-

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Creon scene would have "framed emphatically the confrontations and conflicts within the ideology of democratic Athens and activated the cultural assumption that disobedience of the laws and disturbance of the polis order is to be condemned, and to be seen also as an act of impiety against the gods who guarantee the oath." She considers Creon the spokesman for the polis.

[37] Ibid., 145ff, develops the schema of "father-son hostility," and concludes that Sophocles employs it here to conjure up a negative image of Haemon in the fifth-century audience. In sociological terms, when a would-be murdered turns suicidal, he does so to expiate the guilt of wanting to commit murder. See Van Hooff (above, note 7) 270 n. 90.

band-wife, Haemon succumbs to his grief and stabs himself. His suicide accomplishes several things: first, he is able to punish his father; second, he believes he will rejoin in death his betrothed; and third, he precipitates his mother's suicide which consequently continues the punishment of Creon. However, his suicide is provoked by anger, and according to Aristotle suicide committed in anger alone is cowardly. But the messenger (1242–3) articulates the effect Haemon's suicide has, for it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that thoughtlessness (*aboulia*) is a great evil (*kakon*) for men. In other words, lack of thought or refusal to take advice, i.e., ignoring the intellectual process, is a worse *kakon* than anger.

Eurydice, the wife of Creon and mother of Haemon, also kills herself to be rid of the pain. She, like Deianeira, exits silently and commits suicide, but her part in the *Antigone* is small. Her role only becomes explicable in terms of Creon's, for she shows the one-sidedness of Creon's sense of duty and the tragic results of his growing tyrannical power and pride.[38] Eurydice embodies the private life of the *oikos*, and by her suicide reaffirms its important place in society. Creon represents primarily the *polis*, and yet as a husband and father he ought to feel equally important attachments to his family. Sophocles examines Creon's relationship to his family through Haemon and Eurydice. Though Haemon has a dramatic purpose in the play independent of Creon's, Eurydice functions dramatically as a part of Creon's story, in many ways providing a foil for him. Sophocles does not expend much time on Eurydice; the audience hears nothing about her until her unexpected and unannounced entry late in the play.[39] Like Deianeira, she suffers from feelings of disorientation because her customary world is destroyed, in Eurydice's case, with her children, but she kills herself to reintegrate with them as Antigone commits suicide to rejoin her family.

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[38] Creon generally fares badly in discussions of the *Antigone*. See, e.g., Whitman (above, note 19) 90: "there is nothing tragic or even morally interesting about him. Whether we find Creon thoroughly hateful or merely pitiable, his plight brings little satisfaction. He is puny"; Gellie (above, note 9) 34: "Rule, even autocratic rule, is not essentially petty and cruel. Creon, the man, is petty and cruel;" Burton (above, note 12) 102: "Creon . . . is a stupid and short-sighted man who allows the claims of the gods no validity beyond the immediate and limited scope of his own political principles . . ."; and G. Müller, *Sophokles Antigone* (Heidelberg 1967) 11–4, esp. 11: the position of Creon is one of appearance (Schein) and untragic narrowness (untragische Enge). For a defence of Creon, see W.M. Calder, "Sophokles' Political Tragedy, *Antigone*," *GRBS* 9 (1968) 389–407.

[39] I. Errandonea, "Sophoclei chori persona tragica," *Mnemosyne* 51 (1923) 180–201,

While at the beginning of the play Creon presents a reasonable enough assessment of a king's position (173–83),[40] the action of the rest of the play carries Creon further and further into extreme intransigence and jealous possessiveness of his authority.[41] In particular, Creon displays growing misogynistic qualities.[42] When at last Eurydice does appear on stage, the accumulation of instances of Creon's hatred of women takes on new significance. We begin to become aware of this tendency of Creon's when he tells Antigone that no woman will rule him while he lives (525). He refers to sweet, ineffective Ismene as "lurking like a viper in the house" (531). He characterizes his nieces sarcastically: "One of these girls has shown her lack of sense just now. The other had it from her birth" (561–2). His son's betrothal to Antigone carries no weight with him. After all, "there are other furrows for his plough" (569). He commands the slaves to take the sisters inside because women should not be allowed to run free (578–9). He advises Haemon not to lose his wits over lust for a woman, because a wicked wife is a cold thing. A woman is a wicked friend, and deserves to be spit out (648–53). During this dialogue with Haemon[43] Creon betrays his power mania: "will the *polis* tell me how I ought to rule?" (734). "Must I or someone

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attempts to show how the Cleopatra paradigm in the fourth stasimon foreshadows Eurydice's suicide. But cf. R.F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone. A Study of Poetic Language and Structure* (Princeton 1951) 65–6, who argues cogently against Errandonea's interpretation. See also Burton (above, note 12) 126–32, who sees the ode as having "only a very tenuous connection with the plot. It could indeed with very little alteration be made relevant to any character in any tragedy who is under sentence of death and who stands in need of exhortation before the stroke falls" (132).

[40] Demosthenes quotes part of this speech to Aeschines in 19.247 as an example of political eloquence. See V. Ehrenberg, *Sophocles and Pericles* (Oxford 1954) 58. See also Knox, *Heroic Temper* (above, note 6) 84ff, for echoes of contemporary thought in Creon's speech.

[41] For the chorus' relationship to Creon, and for Sophocles' use of that relationship to highlight Creon's role especially as regards prophecy, see Gardiner (above, note 12) 83–97. See also C.P. Segal, "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the *Antigone*," *Arion* 3 (1964) 46–66, for aspects of Creon's characterization and its connection to the first stasimon.

[42] For aspects of how the male/female conflict shows that "highly structured and aggressive view of the world Creon expresses," see Segal (above, note 41) 51–2. See also J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. II. Antigone* (Leiden 1978) on ll. 484–5; and Goheen (above, note 39) 88: "The dominance of male over female, regarded both physically and sociologically, is . . . for Creon a symbol of the rightful power of a leader over the state . . .".

[43] For a good discussion of Haemon's scene and the Ode to Eros following it, see Gellie (above, note 9) 42ff. See also Reinhardt (above, note 9) 84–6.

else rule this land?" (736).[44] Creon turns sharply on his son and calls him a "woman's slave" (756).

Creon's misogyny has effectively led him to disregard any family commitment, both to his son whom he dismisses rudely, but also to his wife whom he has never mentioned. His increasing power craze has also forced him to disregard his commitment to the *polis*, and when Teiresias enters he proceeds to discredit religion as well. Creon accuses him of being money-mad (1055),[45] and of loving wickedness (1059). In essence Creon has altogether removed himself from his community of family, state and religion, a position which Creon, unlike an Ajax or Achilles, is unable to sustain.[46] Despite his questioning of Teiresias' motives for some 50 verses, Creon does finally realize his constraint (1105–6).[47]

Although the chorus believes that Creon's newly found understanding will halt the tragic progress of the play, a messenger arrives with unexpected news: Haemon has committed suicide (1175).[48] Only at this very late point in the play does the wife of Creon make her unannounced entry.[49] She speaks only nine lines:

> Oh citizens, I heard your words
> as I was coming out to perform
> my services for the goddess Pallas.

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[44] On Creon's emerging tyranny, see A.J. Podlecki, "Creon and Herodotus," *TAPA* 97 (1966) 359–71.

[45] For the "money sequence" imagery in the *Antigone*, see Goheen (above, note 39) 14ff.

[46] For the importance of the idea of "separation" in the *Antigone*, see D.H. Porter, *Only Connect. Three Studies in Greek Tragedy* (Lanham, MD 1987) 45–84.

[47] See Knox, *Heroic Temper* (above, note 6) 67–8, who sees this as the critical point for Creon who now no longer meets the requirements of a Sophoclean hero: "But he lacks the heroic temper. In Creon we are presented with the spectacle of a man who displays every symptom of heroic stubbornness, who is placed in the classic situation of the Sophoclean hero, expressed in the appropriate formulas, but who is swayed by advice, makes major concessions, and collapses ignominiously at the first real threat" (68). See also G. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 124; and Whitman (above, note 19) 95. But cf. C.M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 100; Reinhardt (above, note 9) 91; and Bushnell (above, note 14) 61–2.

[48] For a Durkheimian analysis of the suicide of Haemon, see P. Walcot, "Suicide, A Question of Motivation," in *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster I*, edd., J.H. Betts, J.T. Hooker and J.R. Green (Bristol 1986) 234. See also Gellie (above, note 9) 50–1. It is interesting that Haemon is said to have killed himself *autos pros hautou*, which is the same phrase used of Deianeira and Jocasta, but not of Eurydice or Antigone.

[49] O.Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 11 n. 3.

And I happened to be opening the door
when some sound of personal evil
struck my ears. Being frightened I fell back
into my slaves' arms, and I became dizzy.
But tell me again what the story is.
I will listen since I am not untried in evils
(1183-91).

Eurydice has played no part at all in the play up to this moment. No one has even mentioned her, not even Teiresias in his long prophecy of doom, in part because the play's action has transpired in public, while Eurydice primarily embodies the private life of the *oikos*, in part because Sophocles holds her in reserve to land the final devastating blow on Creon.[50] When she comes out of the house only to fulfill her religious duties, the messenger greets her with his narrative of the suicides of Haemon and Antigone. Eurydice exemplifies the religious and domestic ideals of her society; she is portrayed in these few lines as well-integrated, and properly imbued with her society's ethical precepts. Like Deianeira, Eurydice returns to the house in silence, but in contrast to Deianeira and Jocasta, she exits slowly and deliberately.[51] Her departure creates a brief but significant pause as it engenders extended consternation in the chorus and the messenger. The chorus comments: "what would you think of this? The queen is gone back, before speaking a word, good or bad" (1244–5).[52] For a few more moments the audience continues to focus on her as the messenger expresses his doubts about her actions:

> I too am amazed. But I nourish hopes that hearing the pains of her son she will not think lament in the city right,[53] but within the house will bid her handmaids to mourn her own grief. For she does not lack discretion so as to err (1246–50).[54]

To the messengers's attempt to allay its fear, the chorus responds:

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[50] Although dramatic economy accounts in large part for Eurydice's absence from the action, her own words when she does appear invite a sociological as well as a dramatic interpretation.

[51] See E.P. Garrison, "Eurydice's Final Exit to Suicide in the *Antigone*," *CW* 82 (1989) 431-5.

[52] Dawe emends the mss. *palin* to *palai* "(i.e. 'nuper')." I adopt the mss. reading here and at 1247 (see below).

[53] Dawe emends the mss. reading to *exausein.* Jebb, Pearson, and Lloyd-Jones defend the mss. reading.

[54] Müller (above, note 38) 257, suggests that these lines refer to her impending suicide which will give the occasion for the death lament, finding in *prothesein* an unmistakable echo of *prothesis.*

> I do not know. This very heavy silence seems to portend as much as a great clamor (1251–2).

The messenger agrees with this sentiment, and exits:

> For you speak well, and there is weight in this very heavy silence (1255–6).

With all this emphasis on her silent departure, we have no doubt about the outcome. By the sustained focus on Eurydice's silence, Sophocles manages to give even such a minor figure as Eurydice a moving moment of tormented reflection. Nevertheless, the issue that the poet has expended such care on is abruptly interrupted when Creon enters with the corpse of Haemon. Again, as throughout most of the play, we turn our attention away from Eurydice as Creon, unaware of his wife's demise, sings a dirge for Haemon. It ends like the choral dirge in the *OT* with a tragic assessment of human life (1276).

When the messenger of doom some 26 verses after Eurydice's exit returns with the announcement of her suicide, Creon's dirge continues and Eurydice's body is revealed (1294). The messenger watched her weep for her dead children and stab herself on the altar after her final act of cursing Creon (1301–5).[55] The messenger who shortly before had related in poetic detail the suicides of Haemon and Antigone now very briefly describes Eurydice's. Her motivations resemble, in part, those of Antigone: both sharply felt the loss of their families; both suffered when their integration into those families became impossible. Unlike Antigone, Eurydice's *only* sense of purpose came from her family ties, particularly from her motherhood. Since her family is now destroyed she seeks to rejoin it in death. She commits suicide in a state of despair for her lost family, and reacts to the disintegration of her family in anger as she curses Creon for her losses. As with Deianeira, her private act has public repercussions as King Creon is relentlessly beaten by the pain of separation from his family. In other words, the importance of the *oikos* finds reaffirmation in Eurydice's suicide.

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[55] Müller (above, note 38) 270, points out that Creon is also cursed by Antigone at ll. 423–8 when she discovers the body of Polyneices has been unburied, and at ll. 927–8 when she hopes he will suffer what he is making her suffer. Müller, therefore, sees a connection between Antigone and Eurydice, and supposes that Creon (and so the audience) when he sees Eurydice's corpse is thinking about Antigone as well.

Eurydice chooses to stab herself on the altar, whereas Jocasta and Deianeira both die in their wedding chambers. The locus of the action, on the altar (1301), and the weapon, a knife (1301), at first glance suggest a sacrifice,[56] and though the text at this point is hopelessly corrupt,[57] the scholia paraphrase the line to suggest a sacrifice. Still, there remains some ambiguity, since an altar also provides the locus for activities other than sacrifices, e.g., oath taking or supplication, and the vocabulary describing her act lacks specific sacrificial connotations. The knife as far as we can tell is not a sacrificial knife, not a *sphageus*; nor did she slit her throat in proper sacrificial procedure. Instead, she struck her heart with her hand (*paisas' huph' hēpar autocheir autēn* 1315). Creon in his grief refers to her as a *sphagion* (1291), but he refers to her "slaughter" as heaped upon Haemon's destruction.[58] Whether she sees herself as a sacrifice or not, she chooses the altar as the place most efficacious for increasing the power of her curse on Creon.[59] Like Ajax and Jocasta, she curses the ultimate cause of her self-destruction, and none of them are blamed for it within their plays.[60] The pollution of the altar also bears witness to the seriousness of the disruption of the religious aspects of her society.

Although we may imagine, because of Creon's avid misogyny, that in life her effect on him was negligible, her death casts him down completely.[61] He, like Oedipus, expresses his sense of futility: "Everything in my hands is slanting. Intolerable fate has driven against me" (1344–6). He who throughout the play has cavalierly rejected the strength of private attachments for public concerns now finds himself overwhelmed by a loss of that family. Assuming his patriarchal and hierarchical right to govern citizens, sons and wives, and women, he

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[56] So Loraux (above, note 27) 13–4, and C.W. Oudemans and A.P.M.H. Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity. Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone* (Leiden 1987) 195.

[57] See Kamerbeek, *Antigone* (above, note 42) ad loc.; and Müller (above, note 38) ad loc. The scholion reads *ōs hiereion peri ton bōmon esphage, para ton bōmon propetēs.*

[58] Kamerbeek, *Antigone* (above, note 42) ad loc., correctly renders *sphagion* as "bloody."

[59] For the increased power of curses with suicide, see R. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) 198; W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979) 74; and J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations* (Berkeley 1978) 147f.

[60] This would seem to indicate that gender, contrary to Loraux, does not account for differences in the acceptability of suicide.

[61] C.P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization. An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981) 181ff, interprets Eurydice, the "wide-ruling" Queen of the Dead, "as a manifestation of chthonic female power and maternal vengeance," who makes "the interior spaces of [the] house a dark place of corpses (1298–1300)."

has disregarded that ever important private side of life and ends bereft of everything.[62]

Euripides' Suppliant Women

Evadne, the wife of Capaneus, commits a suicide that depicts elements of "suttee." In this type of suicide, a socially subordinate individual (a slave or a wife) feels a duty to die upon the death of a social superior (a master or husband). Evadne expresses this sense of duty by remarking that her continued existence would be a betrayal to her husband (1024–5). This suicide dies to gain glory from external recognition of personal accomplishment of one's duty, and Evadne's scene abounds with thoughts of glory. Her theatrical scene and exhibitionist suicide,[63] which has generally been considered intrusive in a play of seemingly considerable disjointedness and discontinuity, exhibits a poetic exuberance not found elsewhere in the play. Still it provides more than good theater, as it joins in a continuum several aspects of the story of the Seven.[64]

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[62] Knox, *Heroic Temper* (above, note 6) 111–2. See also Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 56) 196ff, for how Creon's downfall resembles a scapegoat ritual.

[63] For *iactatio* as a motivation in ancient suicide, see van Hooff (above, note 7) 129ff.

[64] The problem of continuity figures significantly in readings of the *Suppliant Women*. See C. Collard, *Euripides' Supplices. Commentary* (Gröningen 1975) 24, for a survey of opinions on the question of unity. Interpreters look for unity from single tragic themes, e.g., "the denial of humanity in withholding burial from the dead," which theme is given continuity through the choral odes that reflect unrestrained grief. In this interpretation the Evadne episode is "interruptive," filling the time needed for the cremations that are impossible to stage, and functioning to widen the tragedy to all relatives of the dead, not simply to their mothers (Collard, 25). Interpretations are hampered by the very corrupt text. See Collard, 360, for some of the textual problems.

J. de Romilly, *L'Évolution du pathetique d'Eschyle à Euripide* (Paris 1961) 37–9, suggests that the Evadne scene interrupts the play and is inserted gratuitously by Euripides. Since Evadne does not sacrifice herself to save someone but only to gain glory, her suicide scene cannot be a way of individualizing the public sorrow prevalent in the rest of the play, and her suicide is pure *pathos* because above all she suffers. This reading creates a blatant contradiction: how, if she only suffers, does she fail to embody the public sorrow? But even more importantly, the text does not support the assertion that "above all, she suffers." Evadne's own words are concerned with glory, honor, love and marriage. She refers only once to the pains of life (1005).

P. Burian, ["*Logos* and *Pathos*: The Politics of the *Suppliant Women*," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian, (Durham 1985) 129–55, following G. Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester 1955) 5 and passim] places the play in a political context, not in the sense that it comments on contemporary events [as for example in U. von Wilamowitz, *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin 1875) 153], but in the

The tragedy takes an intensely personal form in the Evadne-Iphis scene.[65] Evadne's extreme of heroic action contrasts with Iphis' despairing decision to die by starvation. The Evadne-Iphis drama is the reverse of the Aethra-Theseus drama, and by the contrast forms an integral part of the play. Furthermore, Evadne does not envision herself as a figure of *pathos* because she sees transcendence of her misery in joining Capaneus in death. "Her death is no doubt a product of war, but it is emphatically self-chosen, ecstatically sought and embraced as a triumph."[66]

Evadne's actions form an integral part of the play. The death of her husband motivates her suicide, and it is on her marriage that she dwells in language that abounds in metaphor. She greets Argos as the place of her marriage, and is even dressed in wedding attire (1054–7). After referring once to the pains of life (1005), she from now on speaks only of "sweetest death" that allows friends to die with friends (1006–7), and of glory to be attained (1013–5). As she thinks about her fiery leap, her vocabulary becomes erotic: my body mingling in fiery glow with my dear husband, skin lying upon skin

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sense that the world of the *polis* around Euripides influenced him. The play presents two orderings of reality, two *kosmoi*, emotion and intellect, *pathos* and *logos*. Different characters manifest these two *kosmoi*, e.g., Theseus intellect and Adrastus and the Suppliant Women emotion. [For discussions of Theseus, see e.g., R.B. Gamble, "Euripides' 'Suppliant Women': Decision and Ambivalence," *Hermes* 98 (1970) 385–405); M.H. Shaw, "The *ethos* of Theseus in 'The Suppliant Women,' *Hermes* 110 (1982) 3–19; and J.W. Fitton, "The 'Suppliant Women' and the 'Herakleidai' of Euripides'," *Hermes* 89 (1961) 430–61.] Theseus can only undertake their cause when Aethra enumerates religious, political and personal considerations, which subsume the Suppliants' need within the *kosmos* of intellect. The *kosmos* of intellect which seems to prevail with Theseus' victory at the end of the first half of the play proves to be limited, for it is unable to dominate the *kosmos* of emotion that takes center stage in the second half of the play. "In the second action, the expected resolution evaporates in new tensions, and questions seemingly closed are opened once more by a lengthy, intricate process of displacement. The comfortable conclusions of the successful rescue operation are never denied, they simply disappear from view, yield to lament, to consolation, and finally to a renewal of vengeance" (Burian, 145). The play moves further and further away from Theseus' noble, yet legitimate, ideal *kosmos* of intellect, and the *Supplices* becomes, therefore, "a tragedy of men and women doomed not to heroic isolation, but to an imperfect society" (Burian, 155).

[65] Burian (above, note 64) 150ff. For a discussion of the impact of Evadne's suicide on Iphis, see J.E.G. Whitehorne, "The Dead as Spectacle in Euripides' 'Bacchae' and 'Supplices'," *Hermes* 114 (1986) 71.

[66] Burian (above, note 64) 151. Cf. W.D. Smith, "Expressive Form in Euripides' *Suppliants*," *HSCP* 71 (1966) 151–70, who remarks that although she admires her own act, she is deluded. Although her appearance is a theatrical gesture, it does present the main theme of the play, namely, she is a victim of the war and of herself.

(1019–21). As a woman about to meet her husband in an erotic setting, she envisions the thalamos of Persephone (1022), the wedding chamber of *the* Bride of Hades. Evadne's fate closely resembles Persephone's. In Eleusis, the Agelastos Petra marks the place where Hades is purported to have descended with Persephone, and perhaps Evadne jumps from this theatrically recreated rock onto her husband's pyre.[67] Euripides uses the metaphor to localize the action,[68] but he accomplishes much more. Persephone is the epitome of the eternal virgin while simultaneously the powerful divine queen of the dead. Evadne on the other hand is a spouse first and foremost, and a mortal. By imagining herself arriving in Persephone's bedroom, Evadne glorifies her leap even more, and insinuates that her glorious deed will have personally glorious repercussions; namely, she herself will become goddesslike and powerful. In other words, Evadne's use of an inherently paradoxical metaphor here in an unusual way glorifies both herself and her spouse by likening them to the god and goddess of the Underworld.

Evadne realizes, however, that her deed will not appear as glorious to anyone else, for she remarks to her father that he would be angry if he heard her plans, which she is unwilling for him to hear (1050–1). He, too, realizes that her suicide will not be accepted as glorious, and advises her not to mention it to others (1066). Immediately after Evadne's leap, the chorus comments on her deed as terrible (*deinon ergon* 1072) and turns instantly to what Iphis must suffer (1074–5). The chorus is, in other words, amazed, and does not seem to relate to Evadne's suffering.[69] In sociological terms, a person commits an altruistic suicide because of a high degree of integration in society, and thus the individual subordinates him or herself to a greater good. Evadne's social group apparently does not recognize the necessity for suttee, and therefore her suicide fails to be worthy of honor or exemplary.[70] Her motivations are not those of an Ajax, a Menoeceus or even a Phaedra. Her "suttee" singles her out, isolates her. If this is a tragedy of "men and women doomed not to heroic isolation,

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[67] N.J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 220f.

[68] See S. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971) 18 and passim, for Euripides' eye to the importance of environmental detail.

[69] There seem to be among the Greeks no historical examples of suttee, although wifely devotion to the point of death does occur as a motif in myth. See van Hooff (above, note 7) 128.

[70] Contrary to e.g., H. Strohm, *Euripides: Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form* (Munich 1957) 59f.

but to an imperfect society,"[71] then the Evadne scene intrudes, albeit spectacularly.

But perhaps Euripides' spectacular scene serves some more particular dramatic purpose. Evadne exceeds typical feminine reserve by seeking a victory of *aretē*, i.e., a warrior's glory,[72] the same motivation as the Seven who undertook an expedition that the oracles had warned against, something which Euripides highlights frequently. Theseus, in his initial refusal of Adrastus' request, berates Adrastus for being led astray by glory-loving youngsters (232), one of whom is Capaneus, Evadne's husband. Euripides then focusses attention on him in several ways. The Argive herald mentions him as his first example of an overbold young warrior who swore destruction for the city with or without the willingness of the gods (497–9).[73] Capaneus, like Evadne, died a "smoky" death (496–7). The Theban messenger, come to announce Theseus' victory over the Argives, reminds us of the death of Capaneus, whom Zeus with a flaming bolt burnt to ashes (639–60). When the bodies of the fallen are returned to Eleusis, Adrastus praises Capaneus first, again mentioning the lightning bolt (861–71), and gives him the longest praise of the Seven. Theseus further segregates Capaneus by burying him apart as a sacred corpse (934–5), and the chorus, just before it announces Evadne's arrival, refers to the sacred tomb of Capaneus (980–1).

Enter Evadne. Dressed in magnificent wedding attire, clothing denoting the most important ritual for a woman, she plays the counterpart to her husband, who went to his death in equally spectacular attire for war. She refers to him as "bronze-armored" (999). We have already seen how her language is steeped in wedding imagery, but the imagery of light plays an equally important role. "What blaze, what gleam . . ." (990) are her first words. She speaks of the "glow of the pyre" (1002) and of the "fiery glow" (1019). All of this imagery directs our attention to Capaneus, whom we may well imagine as flaming below (off stage) on his pyre. The comparison between Evadne and Capaneus is striking, and her scene of "triumph" invites us to consider the act that caused the entire action of the play, the expedition. When we do so, we discover that both Capaneus and Evadne

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[71] Burian (above, note 64) 151.

[72] Loraux (above, note 27) 29.

[73] For the ambivalence and contradictions inherent in Euripides' presentation of Capaneus, see Gamble (above, note 64) 403–4.

failed in their attempts to gain *aretē*, Capaneus by overstepping human bounds, Evadne by committing suicide.[74]

The following emerges from this reading: the parallel that Euripides creates does not exist between the suffering of Evadne and the "unending woe which resounds from the laments of the Chorus,"[75] nor does the *pathos* of Evadne continue nor enhance that of the mothers.[76] The parallel exists between the aggressive, destructive behavior of Capaneus, which the audience only hears about, and the aggressive, destructive actions of Evadne that Euripides dramatizes.[77] He isolates Capaneus and Evadne in their individual acts of boldness.

The behavior of Capaneus, et al., created the premises for this suppliant play and at the end, Athena recommends the same behavior to the sons of the Seven. Athena's speech carries the action beyond the limits of the play, and therefore, the centrally placed, highly poetic monody of Evadne and her sensational suicide perform an important dramatic task by uniting the past, present and future of the story of the Seven. Euripides through Evadne dramatizes misconceived thoughts of glory, misconceived notions of reality that both precede and follow her glory-seeking actions. The Bride of Hades metaphor in this play becomes one poetic example of overboldness.

Much of Euripides' suppliant play addressed the reasons behind the whole premise of supplication: overbold actions that resulted in disaster. Through Evadne he portrayed one aspect of that sort of overboldness, and also depicted the ends to which someone experiencing severe grief over loss of a loved one may go, even when one's society neither demands nor praises it.

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[74] It is true that Capaneus becomes a *hieros nekros*, but even criminals who meet with spectacular ends can become heroes, e.g., Cleomedes of Astypalaia in Pausanias 6.9.6f. E. Rohde [*Psyche. The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality amoung the Greeks*, trans. W.B. Hillis (London 1925, reprint New York 1968) 582] places much emphasis on Capaneus' success, arguing that Adrastus' funeral oration honors him as the very opposite of an *hybristēs*. Burian (above, note 64) 147, argues persuasively that Adrastus' speech is a "failed attempt at genuine praise" and shows that "he has understood very little and can offer precepts of at best dubious value to the young who are his intended audience." His praise of Capaneus is just a part of this failed attempt.

[75] Zuntz (above, note 64) 12.

[76] Ibid., 13.

[77] Euripides uses the monody as a vehicle for intensely personal feelings. The fact that the protagonist plays the part of Evadne also lends a certain weight to the scene. See Collard (above, note 64) ad loc.

Euripides' Phoenician Women

Euripides' Jocasta, like Sophocles', is also an articulate and regal queen, but unlike Sophocles', she survives the discovery of the dreadful acts of Oedipus and herself. In Euripides' play, she plays the important roles of mother to Eteocles and Polyneices, caretaker to Oedipus, and sister to Creon. In these roles she displays her skill at persuasion, but when her skill fails to achieve peace and she loses her sons, she also kills herself.

Jocasta accepts her guilty part in the problems of the house of Laius, for she admits that it was wrong to marry Oedipus and bear their children (381). Still, she pragmatically observes, "the god's will must be borne" (382). She eloquently attempts to dissuade her sons from their hostility toward one another, but compromise is unwelcome to them. Her despair begins to be felt at the end of their scene: "I suffer very much" (618) and "I was born for suffering" (619), by which she embraces that part of the ethical code that demands endurance and piety.

She receives a brief respite from her sorrow when the messenger relates that Thebes has withstood the Argive attack because of the self-sacrifice of Menoeceus.[78] However, the relief quickly gives way to renewed sorrow when the messenger tells of her sons' intention to face each other in single combat. She hastily rouses Antigone to her aid, and since her powers of persuasion have failed, now she intends to beg them (1278). If that fails and if they die, then Jocasta vows she will "lie with them in death" (1282).

A messenger relates the *kaka* of the death scene (1427ff). By the time Jocasta arrived, Polyneices and Eteocles were at the very point of death. She berates herself for bringing help too late (1432) and watches Eteocles cry and hears Polyneices beg for burial. When they both died, Jocasta grabbed a sword and "did a dreadful deed" (1457). She, like Menoeceus before, drove the sword through her neck and died with her arms around them both, symbolically reenacting her reintegration with her family as Haemon reenacted his wedding with his suicide.

Myraid *kaka* fill the play, and they are of different sorts. They are physical, for the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices are called *kaka*

[78] For a discussion of Menoeceus' death, see my chapter five below and the bibliography there cited.

(1425, 1565) and the suicide of Jocasta is also grouped among the *kaka* (1427; 1696). Antigone also calls Creon's command to forbid the burial of Polyneices wickedly enjoined (1649), because the punishment is not legal (1651). *Kaka* also refer to the spiritual and emotional pain of Oedipus. Both the chorus (1425) and Antigone at 1511 comments upon his *kaka*. She singles Oedipus out as enduring more visible grief from evils than any other high-born individual (1509–13). Antigone expresses the pain of death-separation, and she searches for some mortal (1498–1501) or some divinity (1515–18) to join her in her song of grief. But these *kaka* have only paved the way for more *kaka* to descend upon Oedipus's house, for the chorus remarks that this day has begun many evils for his house (1582–3). Antigone commisserates with her father for his *kaka* (1649), believing that his are worse even than those who have died, for his *kaka* are neither light nor heavy, but a complete misfortune (1641–2). These new evils include the banishment of Oedipus, and Antigone foregoes her marriage to accompany him and to share in his *kaka* (1690). And, though Oedipus tries to dissuade her on the grounds that her flight would be shameful (*aischra* 1691), she replies that for a right-minded woman (*sōphrosynē*) it is a noble act (1692). One final new *kakon* is that Oedipus will wander and die on Attic soil (1704–6). *Kakos* is also used in the more traditional, Homeric sense that one is an inferior human.[79] If I do something beneath me, I seem *kakos*. Oedipus articulates this notion after Creon has banished him. For, he says, even though you cast me out and therefore kill me, I will not clutch your knees and seem *kakos* (1622–3). And, he continues, I would not betray my noble birth even though I am faring badly (*kakōs* 1623–4). Here the action is described as *kakōs*, just as Jocasta describes the act of marrying her father as *kakos* (381). Gods can also act badly, as when one of them set out to destroy *kakōs* the race of Oedipus (378). Later, when Antigone and Oedipus are beginning their exile, Antigone encourages Oedipus to stop speaking of his woes, for Justice (*dikē*) does not look upon the *kakous* (1726). No moral judgement is passed here, but simply a recognition that Oedipus is now an inferior. And, Antigone concludes, they are now isolated in their exile, for her friends and the holy altars have had enough of her *kaka* (1747–50).

Another *kakon* occurs when moral precepts become muddled. Help

[79] A.W.H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece from Homer to the end of the Fifth Century* (New York 1972) esp. 65.

your friends and harm your enemies is a precept that demands strict divisions between who is a friend and who is an enemy. In this play, the brothers, Polyneices and Eteocles, who by nature of the kin relationship are *philoi*, and who have common *philoi* (1389), have instead become *echthroi*. The messenger sums up this paradox when he quotes Polyneices saying: "friend has become enemy, but nevertheless a friend" (1446). When Antigone suggests to Creon that the law of non-burial is in fact illegal, he replies that it is legal for an enemy who wasn't an enemy (1652). Creon sees things in terms of the state, while Antigone thinks of the kin relationship. She responds that good reputation comes from two friends lying near each other (1659). All family relationships are blurred, wife/mother; husband/son; daughter/sister; son/brother; but the blurring of the brother/brother relationship reflects back on the moral precept, showing how confusing political and family distinctions can become.

When Antigone relates Jocasta's suicide to Oedipus, she begins: "She showed all men her groaning tears" (*dakrua yoera* 1567), and then repeats the messenger's description of how she took a sword from the dead and plunged it in her flesh, in grief (*achei* 1578). Though Jocasta killed herself when she could no longer bear the god's will, Oedipus at the end realizes that necessity is upon mortals to endure the gods restraints (*anangkas* 1763).

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Grief, displayed by groaning tears, and precipitated by the loss of loved ones or loss of a solid foundation for existence, is a powerful impetus to self-destruction. Society defines one's status and recognizes individuals based on that definition. When the larger environment, i.e., the state or the family, is lost or somehow conflicts with an individual identity, then the individual may succumb to grief and commit suicide. Or, to put it in terms of the ethics of fifth-century Athenian life, when one's network of *philia* loses its efficacy, self-chosen death is preferable to a life filled with grief. So, for example, Capaneus' death creates a *kakon* for Evadne because her place in society was as a wife. Eurydice and Euripides' Jocasta both lose their status as mothers, while Haemon succumbs to feelings of hopelessness for his and his city's future. Sophocles' Jocasta commits suicide because her world has been completely redefined but in culturally unacceptable terms.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOBLE SUICIDE

Living ignobly is a great burden.
Hecuba 378

Willingness to die for one's ideals motivates several tragic suicides. Noble suicide shows the basically paradoxical relationship of an individual to his or her society. The altruistic tendencies that cause an individual to sacrifice himself or herself for a greater good, perceived or real, often mix disastrously with a tendency to self-reliance and a too-severe adherence to passé or ungrounded social demands. Individuals who claim to die for the greater good often find the impetus to kill themselves in thoughts of glory and the promise of something better for themselves after death. In Greek tragedy, self-sacrifice is not without question admirable, and Greek "martyrdom" often differs from Christian self-sacrifice not only in motivation but also in execution.

Antigone in her name play chooses to die because she fervently believes she has done what had to be done, and she chooses to commit suicide to escape the pain of a slow death by burial alive. She sacrifices herself to uphold traditional customs. Menoeceus in the *Phoenician Women*, Macaria in the *Children of Heracles*, and Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Aulis* also sacrifice themselves to benefit their societies, motivated further by the promise of glory.[1] Clearly the similarity of vocabulary

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[1] Though the *Alcestis* is chronologically first (438), my discussion of the Euripidean self-sacrifice tragedies begins with the *The Phoenician Women* (ca. 409–7) because Menoeceus clearly commits suicide. The Euripidean plays are often discussed as examples of self-sacrifice and therefore distinct from suicide. For a general discussion of self-sacrifice, see H. S. Versnel, "Self-Sacrifice, Compensation and the Anonymous Gods," in *Le Sacrifice dans l'antiquité. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* XXVII (Geneva 1981) 135–94, and the bibliography there cited; and A.J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (Routledge 1990) 126ff.

The act of self-sacrifice in Euripides occurs not only in the plays under discussion above, but also in the *Hecuba* and the fragmentary *Erechtheus*. "Self-sacrifice" is reported in *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Trojan Women*. Interpretations of the phenomenon can be found in e.g., J. Schmitt, *Freiwillige Opfertod bei Euripides. Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 17.2 (Geisen 1921); P. Roussel, "Le Thème du sacrifice volontaire dans la tragedie d'Euripide," *RBPh* 1 (1922) 225–40; G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941), *Phoenissae* 353–73; *Heracleidae* 166–76; *Iphigenia at*

between the clear case of suicide, Menoeceus, and the suicidally motivated self-sacrifices of Macaria and Iphigenia suggests that the fine line between self-destruction and self-sacrifice interested Euripides, and that he exploited it in several ways to disclose complex attitudes toward fifth-century institutions. Menoeceus (as does Ajax) uses the

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Aulis 421–38; H. Strohm, *Euripides. Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form* (Munich 1957) 50–3; H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (London 1961) 254–9; T.B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 103f, 279; A.P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal* (Oxford 1971) 22–8; P. Vellacott, *Ironic Drama. A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning* (Cambridge 1975) esp. chapter 7 "Sacrifice for Victory;" H. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca 1985); N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass. 1987) 31ff; E.A.M.E. O'Connor-Visser, *Aspects of Human Sacrifice in the Tragedies of Euripides* (Amsterdam 1987); and J. Wilkins, "The State and the Individual: Euripides' Plays of Voluntary Self-Sacrifice," in *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*, ed. A. Powell (Routledge 1990) 177–94.

Grube, Strohm, Kitto, Webster and Loraux, to name a representative few, accept the deaths of Menoeceus, Macaria and Iphigenia as examples of pure and noble self-sacrifice portrayed by a sympathetic Euripides. Loraux, 41–2, argues that tragedy furnishes the city with an imaginary and institutionalized transgression by sacrificing young virgins. Self-sacrifices create a variant of the hoplite "belle mort," and they cannot be analyzed as suicides because these virgins only accept death; they do not look for it. By self-sacrifice one gains glory, whereas suicide, according to Loraux, is not an heroic act. In chapter one, I presented ancient evidence which contradicts Loraux's claims, and in sociological terms, self-sacrifice does not distinguish itself from suicide as in both cases one renounces existence. The self-sacrifice commits an altruistic suicide. Menoeceus in particular presents a problem, since he is clearly a suicide: he takes the sword in his hand and plunges it into his neck. He has motivation: he is excessively integrated into the community that asks for his death. And he makes his intent clear, as we will see. To avoid this problem, Loraux subsumes Menoeceus under the category of "virgin sacrifice," and suggests that since it is a male (and especially Theban) prerogative to wield a knife, he is actually a self-sacrifice and not a suicide.

Other scholars, like Vellacott, develop the theme of self-sacrifice differently and call into serious question any patriotic image of Euripides. Vellacott, 180–2, shows that each case of self-sacrifice is repudiated by some significant character in the drama, and he suggests that Euripides shows interest in the subject of human sacrifice not so much for its historical, religious and anthropological significance as for its illumining impact on the audience in their immediate situation of the Peloponnesian wars. Vellacott proposes that the negative judgement passed in these plays on human sacrifice was intended to engender a similarly negative judgement on political massacre and war in general. Although much of Vellacott's "ironic" reading of Euripides remains highly speculative, he is certainly correct in calling attention to the complexity of the Euripidean "self-sacrifice" plays. This controversial work, despite its deficiencies, at least is useful in asking readers of Euripides to consider new possibilities for interpretation, and his chapter on self-sacrifice in particular is very provocative.

For other readings which interpret Euripides as censuring the practice see J. de Romilly, "Les 'Phéniciennes' d'Euripide ou l'actualité dans la tragédie grecque," *RPh* 91 (1965) 28–47, esp. 41ff; Roussel; D. Sansone, "The Sacrifice-Motif in Euripides' *IT*," *TAPA* 105 (1975) 283–95; or Foley, 60, who says "even the uplifting voluntary

vocabulary typical of sacrifice (*sphazō*),[2] but other characters perceive the deaths in pragmatic terms: the messenger notes that Menoeceus thrust the sword through his own neck (*Ph.* 1091–2), as Tecmessa observes that Ajax set his hand against himself (*Ajax* 906). Teucer when he discovers Ajax's body uses the verb *ekpneusai*, which is the same word used by Macaria, the former used expressly of suicide, the latter reminiscent of it. Iphigenia generally refers to her death in nonsacrificial language, and she insists that it is her decision to die (*I.A.* 1375). The ambiguity of the vocabulary employed for nondisputed cases of suicide, i.e., vocabulary sometimes sacrificial, sometimes suicidal (Ajax, Menoeceus), affords us the opportunity to consider the other cases of self-sacrifice (Macaria, Iphigenia) in terms of their social motivations and general dramatic function. Given that the social motivations display severe altruistic tendencies, these self-sacrifices will be discussed as variants of suicide,[3] which I call "noble suicides." Polyxena's noble death in the *Hecuba* reflects her wish to be rid of a pitifully curtailed life, and though she accomplishes nothing overtly for the greater good, she stays true to her nobility by dying gracefully. Alcestis in her name play sacrifices herself so that her husband may survive, and her unselfishness finds reward in a return from death.

Treating the Euripidean plays thematically rather than chronologically, I shall argue that Euripides probes the underlying conception of and rationale for the whole process of self-sacrifice by conflating elements of the sacrificial procedure with suicidal actions in the case of Menoeceus; by giving Macaria personal and fatalistic as well as public and altruistic motives; and by burdening the fragile Iphigenia with the heavy demands of idealistic patriotism, for which she is unprepared. In the person of Polyxena he presents grace, innocence and beauty succumbing to the burden of ignoble life (373ff). Through Alcestis he reminds us of the very real subordination of women to a

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sacrifices of Euripidean youth are made to seem deceptive and wasteful in the shabby world in which they are performed."

[2] For a comprehensive discussion of sacrificial terminology see J. Casabona, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire des sacrifices en grec des origines à la fin de l'Époque classique* (Aix-en-Provence 1966). See also W. Burkert, "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 87–121, esp. 102–13.

[3] In so doing I follow R. Hirzel, "Der Selbstmord," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* Band 11 (Leipzig 1908, reprint Darmstadt 1966) 75ff, 243ff, 417ff, with the difference that I do not see Euripides as a great "patriot" who supports Athenian policy of the late fifth century.

male supremacy that places more value on ideals like *xenia* than on female life.

Antigone

The plot of the *Antigone* revolves around burial, an issue that motivates every player's actions and involves all society. Consequently, society has a profound, though paradoxical, effect on Antigone and her decision to commit suicide. Throughout her play conflicting forces drive her: the need to rejoin her family that is dead, but her refusal to integrate into her city. Like Ajax, she is caught between conflicting societies, one traditional and time-honored but disintegrating, and one newly emerging yet still unsettled. Her death is both the result of an indirect negative action in that she disobeys Creon's order, and it is simultaneously a direct positive act: she hangs herself. Her intent is explicit; at 72 she states her awareness of the consequences of her defiance: it is good for me doing this to die. To live nobly, to die nobly as a martyr for one's convictions, the Ajaxian maxim holds for Antigone.

In Antigone's well-known speech about "unwritten laws" (460–70) where she describes society in terms of Zeus, Dikē's laws, the *polis* and the family, she contrasts two social structures: one based on Creon's laws, one on unwritten laws.[4] Antigone's complete reliance on her family is revealed by her vocabulary. Her first words addressed to her sister Ismene (1) and her first action when she turns to her sister for help stress her familial bonds from the very beginning of the play. Only when her sister's help is not forthcoming does

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[4] In social-anthropological terms, the *Antigone* examines the conflict between a traditional and kin-based society which abides by customary but unwritten rites of burial and an emergent and complex *polis*-based one which bases its authority on the written law. For various views of the conflict in the *Antigone*, see B.M.W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) 96–8; S. Murnaghan, "*Antigone* 904–20 and the Institution of Marriage," *AJP* 107 (1986) 192–207; R.W. Bushnell, "Stage Tyrants. The Case of Creon and Caesar," *CML* 7 (1987) 71–85; M.W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge 1989) 133; and C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' *Antigone*," *JHS* 109 (1989) 134–48. Perhaps interpreters exaggerate the dichotomy between Creon and Antigone regarding written or unwritten laws. For my purposes the salient point is that both the family and the city are social units, and Antigone chooses integration into one rather than the other. I am grateful to Professor Ruth Scodel for helping me clarify this point.

she retreat into herself (32). These family bonds receive further stress although they become increasingly directed toward her dead family and away from the remnants of her living family.[5] Antigone states the break most explicitly at 555 when she reminds Ismene that while Ismene has chosen to live, she herself has chosen to die rather than neglect a family duty.[6] So completely integrated into the familial society, Antigone scorns any conflicting social structure. Her family duty to bury her kin takes precedence over any other consideration, and she breaks the laws Creon decreed. As a proponent of older, traditional values she sets herself apart from the life of the city, but since these traditional values place great emphasis on family life, she commits suicide both to escape Creon's world that she refuses to understand or join, but paradoxically to join representatives of a simpler world. Her exit speech records yet another ambiguity: her willingness to die, her "martyrdom," as expressed by Ismene and Creon, suggests her lack of integration into the city. Not only does she disobey Creon in the burial issue, but also by securing death for herself she further blocks her integration into the *polis* because marriage is the rite by which a young girl enters her adult role and leaves her natal family. Yet simultaneously her laments at dying unmarried suggest that she might have embraced the *philia* of the *polis* after all.[7] In sociological terms even her suicide is paradoxical, for it represents both an intense isolation from the society represented by the *polis* (like Ajax), but an equally intense denial of one's own existence in favor of integration with another aspect of society, represented by her natal family. No one in the play condemns her for committing suicide, and by her suicide she reaffirms the importance of the house,

[5] As T.C.W. Oudemans and A.P.M.H. Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity. Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone* (Leiden 1987) 167, point out, in "defending her family, Antigone is forced to undermine her most important family tie—she disobeys her guardian [Creon]."

[6] Thucydides in his description of the plague at Athens describes how men disregarded all duties, sacred or profane. The specific example that he cites is that of family burial (2.52). However, since Antigone is an unmarried maiden her action was probably considered excessive. See Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 5) 167. L.J. Bennett and W.B. Tyrrell, "Sophocles' *Antigone* and Funeral Oratory," *AJPh* 111 (1990) 441–56, note that Creon, though wrong for exposing the corpse, was attempting to do what Athenians themselves had been doing since the time of Solon: "Namely, attempting to impose legislation that restricted women's participation in burials" (456).

[7] For aspects of *philia* in the play, see Blundell (above, note 4) esp. 130ff, and W.J. Lane and A.M. Lane, "The Politics of *Antigone*," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, ed. J. Euben (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986) 162–82.

as will Eurydice by her suicide later.[8] Yet in an ironic way she reaffirms the life of the city because as the last in a line of suicidal Labdacids she removes her polluting power.[9]

Much of this central conflict resonates in a prevalent motif of the play, the Bride of Hades, which "first makes itself felt at 73, is present in a coarse modulation in 524, veiled at 560, clear in 654, explicit in 810–816, again at 1205, 1207, 1240,"[10] to which list add 870.[11] This motif provides a point of convergence for two important themes:

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[8] For a discussion of Eurydice's suicide, see my chapter four.

[9] Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 5) 191, and D. Pozzi, "The Metaphor of Sacrifice in Sophocles' 'Antigone' 853–856," *Hermes* 117 (1989) 500–5. See also Sourvinou-Inwood (above, note 4) 148, who concludes that Antigone's action was both right and wrong: right because it reversed an offence against the gods (not burying Polyneices) and wrong because she disobeyed the *polis*.

[10] J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. II. The Antigone* (Leiden 1978) 146.

[11] Metaphor is ubiquitous in poetry, and characterized, according to Aristotle (*Poetics* 22, 1459a and *Rhetoric* III,10,1410b), by economy, originality and the conceptual element it embodies. Metaphors create one aspect of poetic language and "may stand in their own right, serving a temporary purpose by a single occurrence, or they may add to the density of texture in a particular description, or they may by repetition establish cross-links which underline a key theme." S.A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971) 113–4. Although no ancient Greek phrase for "Bride of Hades" is attested, no *ē tou Haidou numphē*, the modern construct provides a convenient way of speaking about one idea, marriage to death, which assumes a variety of expressions in Greek. In the following discussion, I allude to all the Greek variants under the umbrella metaphor "Bride of Hades."

Marriage and death both entail initiation rites. The goal in each is the same: an individual leaves behind one social situation for a different one. For these transitions, ceremonies enable the initiate to pass from one well-defined position to another equally well-defined one. The similarity of goals produces a wide degree of similarity among ceremonies of birth, childhood, marriage and funerals because each of these is a rite of passage. On initiation rites, see A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London 1960). For the specific rites of the Greeks, see e.g., J. Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton 1983); R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London and Ithaca 1985); and R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Life* (Ithaca 1990). Marriage and funeral rites are particularly close. Artemidorus in his *Oneirocriticon* II.49 [*The Interpretation of Dreams* by Artemidorus, translation and commentary by R.J. White (New Jersey 1975). For the Greek text, see *Artemidori Daldiani, Onirocriticon Libri V*, ed. R. Pack (Leipzig 1963).] says that to dream of death "signifies marriage for a bachelor. For both, marriage and death, are considered to be critical points of completion (*telē*) in a man's life, and one is always represented by the other. And so, if a sick man dreams that he is being married, it portends death." Or at I.80: "To have sexual intercourse with a god or goddess or to be possessed by a god signifies death for a sick man. For the soul predicts meetings and intercourse with the gods when it is about to abandon the body in which it dwells." Stating the connection between marriage and death most clearly, he says at II.65: "Since marriage is also similar to death and is represented by death, I thought it would be appropriate to treat the subject now. If a sick man dreams that he is marrying a maiden, it portends his death. For the same things that happen to a bridegroom happen to a

death and marriage.[12] Even a surface reading of the *Antigone* shows that these themes occur significantly in almost every episode. Every character (except Teiresias and Eurydice) and the chorus allude to the marriage theme, while the theme of death manifests itself in the guise of burial issues, death in war, and most particularly, suicide. Sophocles avails himself of the Bride of Hades metaphor throughout the play to contract the two themes into one concise thought, but the fourth episode gives the most striking example of the convergence. Sophocles' use of the Bride of Hades motif throughout the

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dead man." These statements of Artemidorus are a prosaic form in later antiquity of the tragic "Bride of Hades" motif.

An obvious paradox arises because marriage reaffirms life and its procreation while death destroys both. Why, then, do ritual parallels exist? Besides the similar goal of each rite of passage, what is there in the ideas that is mutually evocative? What does one understand by the poetic metaphor of the Bride of Hades? One explanation is that the marriage motif adds a glimmer of happiness to the sadness of death [J.C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1909, reprint New York 1964) 560]. Or, to be a Bride of Hades means simply to die [W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. P. Bing (Berkeley 1983) 262]. Or, that parents who set up a wedding *loutrophoros* on an unmarried child's tomb were trying to make happy and complete the life cut short, "affirming that the regular stages of maturity and marriage had been at least potential in his interrupted career" [E. Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley 1979) 55]. Or, because a virgin dies unto herself at marriage, therefore the Bride of Hades motif is but one incarnation of the equivalence of death and marriage [Loraux (above, note 1) 37]. Certainly the motif evokes more than a simple equivalence, and the various, sometimes subtly different, interpretations of the motif point to its complexity.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* describes how Persephone, the first "Bride of Hades" in Greek literature, became queen of the underworld [see N.J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) for a detailed summary, and for text and commentary]. Persephone turns out to be the only "real" Bride of Hades. For an amusing and interesting discussion about why Hades wants so many brides, see H.J. Rose, "The Bride of Hades," *CP* 20 (1925) 238–42. He interprets the motif as representing a fertility rite. Many elements from it recur in the tragedies in which the Bride of Hades motif functions: abduction from a meadow, departure in a chariot, father's consent, maiden's unwillingness, binding, marriage, death and rescue are the elements that the tragedians exploit in their treatments. In the *Hymn to Demeter* the coincidence of the elements of the rituals that accompany marriage and death find their first artistic expression.

The motif occurs in 9 extant tragedies: Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, Euripides' *Alcestis*, *Hecuba*, *Suppliant Women*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Medea*, *Orestes* and *Trojan Women*. Though there is no necessary link between the motif and suicide, interestingly Aeschylus and Sophocles each use the metaphor in only one extant play and these plays involve suicides and suicide threats. The inherent link is between the motif and death, but one significant form of death in Greek tragedy is suicide.

[12] See R.F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone. A Study of Poetic Language and Structure* (Princeton 1951) 37–41.

play prepares us for Antigone's striking metaphorical statement in her kommos with the chorus: "I will marry Acheron" (816), which occurs when the imagery of death becomes more specifically the imagery of suicide, and Antigone's use of the motif for herself is full of pathos. Even the mean-spirited Creon comments on people who sing their own dirges (883–4). Antigone sings her dirge in anticipation of her suicide.

In the third episode that creates a crucial introduction to the pathos of the fourth episode, the chorus heralds Haemon's entrance by reminding the audience that he is betrothed to Antigone.[13] The initial exchange between Creon and Haemon then centers on the marriage, although Haemon purposely transfers his concern from Antigone to his father to no avail. At 750ff the marriage and death motifs converge in a confrontational and threatening way. To Creon's statement "you shall not marry her while she's alive," Haemon responds "then she shall die, and upon dying will destroy another." Creon, in complete exasperation, spits out "bring the hateful object, so that she might die immediately before the eyes of her bridegroom" (760–1). It is at the end of this episode that Creon changes Antigone's punishment from stoning to death to burial alive, an act that "constitutes a total confusion of life and death, of above and below, of Olympus and Hades, of marriage and burial, of procreation and extinction."[14]

The fourth episode resonates with pathos. Though knowing from the onset of the action that she must die, and apparently having taken the steps through blatant disobedience that would absolutely ensure her death, she now learns that she will be buried alive. She is horrified, though not broken.[15] Her lyrics concentrate on death and marriage imagery that has been articulated in some way or other in every previous scene and by all major characters. Not surprisingly

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[13] For a sustained discussion of this episode, see Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 5) 180–6.

[14] Oudemans (above, note 5) 185, also points out that a normal execution would have resulted in an "uncontrollable pollution."

[15] Kamerbeek (above, note 10) 23. For a discussion of the problem of Antigone's change and reversal see H. Rohdich, *Antigone. Beitrag zu einer Theorie des sophokleischen Helden* (Heidelberg 1980) 11–9; and Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 5) 186–93. For a discussion that suggests that Antigone's behavior is motivated by a combination of reason and instinct as opposed to the extreme views that stress either reason or instinct, see C.S. Levy, "Antigone's Motives: A Suggested Interpretation," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 137–44.

at this crucial point of the action the imagery merges in one simple sentence: I will marry Acheron (*Acheronti numpheusō* 816). The Bride of Hades motif, hinted at by Antigone as early as 73, coarsely suggested twice by Creon consistent with his personality at 524 and 654, now rings clearly yet pathetically. She reveals much by one brief metaphor. She envisions her premature death as a marriage, in part because she sees her "life" as having meaning only in the underworld where she will join her family.[16] She also reminds us by this statement that she remains forever a maiden; her sexuality will only come of age in her death, death by her hand, and not through her marriage to Haemon. When she expresses this brief sentiment, she knows she will die a horrible death, and so the process leading to her "anticipatory" suicide subtly begins. She chooses Niobe as her mythological exemplum since there was no escape for her from her rock covering either.[17] The comparison with Niobe calls to mind petrification, though Antigone will not petrify by dying slowly, but by dying unfulfilled as a woman. Her regenerative power, unlike Niobe's, will petrify before it can begin.

Antigone makes a clear statement of her suicidal intentions in 858ff in a family context: she goes to stay with her pitiful father, her destructive mother. The marriage motif remains uppermost in her mind and she even applies the Bride of Hades metaphor to Polyneices in 870. The choice offered by Creon in 887–8 of either dying or living though buried is of course superfluous to Antigone who has consistently chosen death. The difference now is that she realizes it must be death by her own hand. Yet she presents her intention to kill herself so subtly that it eludes the chorus, for in the fourth stasimon the mythological examples of imprisonment that clearly pertain to Antigone, Danae and Cleopatra, are examples in which the imprisoned women are rescued.[18] Once buried alive, Antigone takes control over her life and her sexuality in her suicide through hanging

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[16] See Garland, *Death* (above, note 11) chapter 5; and Blundell (above, note 4) chapter 4.

[17] For Antigone as a *mater dolorosa*, see C.P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization. An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981) 180–3; and Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 5) 188–9, who stress that though Antigone recognizes the similarity, she does not accept her situation.

[18] For discussions of this complicated ode see, e.g., R.W.B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980) 126–32; C.P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus. A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City 1987) 92–3; Oudemans and Lardinois (above, note 5) 146–51; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "The Fourth Stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone*,"

herself with her girdle, the loosening of which symbolizes her loss of virginity,[19] but a loss that precludes regeneration and thus integration into her *polis*.

For the remainder of the play the Bride of Hades metaphor modulates from the imagery of death in general to the imagery of suicide in particular. The exodos is full of death, specifically suicide, as the messenger in the presence of Eurydice, who in turn kills herself reports the suicides of Haemon and Antigone. As he does so he also employs the metaphor (1204–5; 1240–1) in such a way to invoke the erotic aspect of marriage,[20] which paradoxically reinforces the barrenness of the marriage of Haemon and Antigone. About Antigone's suicide he speaks of the rock bed of the maiden, the empty marriage chamber of Hades (1204–5), and of Haemon he says that he met his marriage rites in the house of Hades (1240–1). Both statements, the one by indirectly suggesting the marriage bed, the other by referring to the consummation, are sensual yet dark in their imagery. The Bride of Hades metaphor imbues the equivalence of its parts with a dark and paradoxical eroticism. Its very paradoxical nature provides Sophocles here with a powerful metaphor that he has worked into the texture of the play, establishing crosslinks between major themes, or stinging the audience by its occurrence. This paradoxical metaphor is well-suited to suicide in general because taking one's own life often seemed paradoxical to the ancient Greeks, and in particular an apt metaphor for the martyr Antigone.

Phoenician Women

Euripides' characters, unlike Sophocles' Ajax or Antigone, present different types of suicidal victims, victims developed dramatically to show little or no sense of self-worth outside their community. A proph-

BICS 36 (1989) 141–65; R. Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy. The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry* (London 1990) 83–90; and R. Seaford, "The Imprisonment of Women in Greek Tragedy," *JHS* 110 (1990) 76–90.

[19] Loraux (above, note 1) 31–2, because she distinguishes between spouses who commit suicide and virgins who are killed, must somehow account for Antigone's suicide. She suggests that in fact Antigone's suicide is a sort of abnormal sacrifice, based on Creon's words at 773–80. But Creon makes a feeble attempt to rid himself of guilt, and these few words of his do not represent Antigone's perceptions or actions.

[20] For the importance of Eros throughout the play, see R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles. An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1981) 92–8.

ecy related by Teiresias demands the death of Menoeceus in the *Phoenician Women*.[21] The complex distinction between self-sacrifice and suicide becomes blurred as Menoeceus not only renounces his existence for a greater societal good but also plunges the knife into his neck (1091–2). An oracle demands his death, and he alone will be an efficacious sacrifice as the one survivor of the Sown Men who is of pure blood and still a virgin.[22] Though Creon chooses to save his son, Menoeceus never wavers from his resolve to die for his country for fear he may prove a coward and a weakling (997ff). Using typically sacrificial language, he announces he will slay himself (*sphaxas*) over the black pits of the dragon to free the land (1008–10). A higher authority has ordered Menoeceus to commit institutional suicide; it demands self-sacrifice.[23] Menoeceus now renounces his life for the benefit of his people and land, laying bare his motivations. In social terms he is completely a part of the state and has lost any sense of individuality. His person claims no notice; his only duty is to the state,[24] and he believes he will gain a greater good by dying. His motives are pure and noble as he commits suicide.

In this very episodic play[25] the Menoeceus episode seems to have little dramatic relevance.[26] Still, the contrasts it highlights between

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[21] Euripides uses oracles to foretell events outside the drama rather than to contribute to the immediate sense of the tragedy proper. Oracles, like the gods, by prophesying the future keep the drama in its proper legendary framework, and the balance and perspective that derive from the future or past information they provide help to take the drama beyond the individual events and the particular time and place. Grube (above, note 1) 77. Furthermore, they move, it seems, on a moral rather than an existential plane. Kamerbeek (above, note 10) 38–9. See also J.C. Kamerbeek, "Prophecy and Tragedy," *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965) 29–40; H.D.F. Kitto, *Poiesis. Structure and Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1966) esp. 191; and D.H. Roberts, *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia*, *Hypomnemata* Heft 78 (1984).

[22] Haemon is unsuitable because, though unmarried, he is already betrothed (944–5).

[23] Socrates furnishes a historical example of this kind of suicide, and he also insisted that his act was for the good of the state in the *Crito*. See also my chapter one.

[24] This is not to trivialize his *aretē* or his courage. But a soldier's *aretē* is defined by sublimation of the part to the whole. Thus, Achilles puts his on hold because of his rejection of Agamemnon's authority in *Iliad* 1. For a discussion of this important value in Greek ethics, see A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960) 46ff, 165ff, 304ff; and his "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* n.s. 16 (1966) 193–219, esp. 206.

[25] For discussions concerning the relevance of the various episodes to the unity of the play as a whole, see D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme, and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 230–2; and Foley (above, note 1) 112–5, esp. n. 16.

[26] But see, e.g., Foley's (above, note 1) discussion in which she argues that the Menoeceus scene functions primarily to put the story back on its mythic track; or

Menoeceus' sense of patriotic duty, Creon's exaggerated family interest and Polyneices' and Eteocles' self-interest definitely lend significance to the scene, for in sociological terms each represents one facet of society. Menoeceus' patriotism brinks on fanatacism, and he finds himself at disequilibrium in society. The Menoeceus incident combines the past, present and future of the story of Thebes, and Euripides incorporates it into the play by creating transitions to and from it, particularly through its connection with the oracle. After the Eteocles-Creon interview (690ff), Eteocles commands Creon to summon Teiresias because presumably one always seeks portents before battle.[27] Since he himself cannot deal with the prophet because previously he found fault with his craft and consequently Teiresias hates him (774), Eteocles instead bids Menoeceus to fetch the prophet, and so Euripides has introduced the two characters who will share the "self-sacrifice" scene with Creon. After his death Menoeceus, unlike Evadne or Macaria, does not fade immediately into oblivion because Jocasta (1205–7) and Creon (1310–21) mourn him.

The Menoeceus scene proper begins when Teiresias enters with Menoeceus at l. 834. After prodding by Creon, Teiresias prophesies that Creon must kill Menoeceus for the country's sake (911–4). Though Creon has two sons, Menoeceus alone will be an efficacious sacrifice because of his virginal status. Teiresias describes Menoeceus as a "colt" (*pōlos*)[28] dedicated to the city that he might save by dying (947–8). The oracle demanding the death of one of the pure Sown Men accordingly functions both to create a continuum of past, present and future, and to place the human events against a divine background. Teiresias leaves Creon with a clear-cut choice: save your city or save your son (952). Creon, finally jarred out of his silent reaction to Teiresias,[29] wholeheartedly clings to the second choice

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E. Rawson, "Family and Fatherland in Euripides' *Phoenissae*," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 109–27, who finds relevance in the Menoeceus episode because it addresses one of the most important political ideas in the play, exile, which in turn shows that selflessness towards fatherland always outstrips all other values (125). She contrasts Menoeceus' with Antigone's reaction to exile.

[27] For details see W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Greek States at War. Part III: Religion* (Berkeley 1979) chapter 3.

[28] Loraux (above, note 1) 35–6, argues that this "colt" metaphor shows that Menoeceus (like Polyxena) is a suitable victim for an unorthodox sacrifice as well as a candidate for marriage, since both sacrifice and marriage entail the taming of the untamed.

[29] The choral comment on Creon's silence has induced some scholars to question the authenticity of ll. 915–27, which present him as a less noble and dignified per-

and advises Menoeceus to flee for his life (962ff). Though Menoeceus feigns acceptance of his father's escape plan until Creon exits, he finally rejects it because it would compromise his altruistic and noble resolve to die for his country.

The Teiresias-Creon-Menoeceus episode is framed by two choral odes of similar content and dramatic purpose.[30] After Eteocles orders Creon to consult the seer, the chorus of Phoenician women invokes Ares, contrasting the sorrow he brings with the joy of Dionysus (784–800). Its thoughts shift to Theban legend, first the more recent story of Oedipus and the sphinx (801–17), and then to the very inception of the Cadmean race (818–32), thus providing historical background to the immediate situation of the conflict between Polyneices and Eteocles. The third stasimon (1019–66) similarly places the immediate context of Menoeceus' death in the series of Theban disasters. Its alternating rhythm of pain and relief, the wickedness of the sphinx overcome by Pythian-sent Oedipus (1044), who in turn stained the town and cursed his sons (1050–1), so that now Menoeceus must die to save the land (1055), foreshadows the peculiarity of Menoeceus' act of self-sacrifice. In the history of Thebes, relief only signals further distress. The ode ends, as it began, with emphasis on the unrelenting curse on Thebes (1065–6).

The second and third stasima and the prophecy of Teiresias all provide the Menoeceus episode with relevance to the larger story.[31] He becomes just one more Theban who, though with the best intentions, fails in his endeavors because his sphere of human activities clashes with the divine world.[32] All these Theban males react to oracles,

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son than the Creon we see later. B. Snell, "Zu Euripides' *Phoenissae*," *Hermes* 87 (1959) 7–12, shows persuasively that the character of Creon becomes more realistic if he first reacts passionately to Teiresias' demand, but subsequently regains his composure.

[30] On the odes in this play in general, see M.B. Arthur, "The Curse of Civilization: The Choral Odes of the *Phoenissae*," *HSCP* 81 (1977) 163–85, who notes that "Thebes herself is a place of violence, and in subsequent [to the parodos] odes the chorus explore the process whereby in Thebes the recurrent clash of forces ends, not in reconciliation, but in mutual slaughter" (169); and Foley (above, note 1) 136–9.

[31] Foley (above, note 1) 132–6, argues that Menoeceus' self-sacrifice takes the place of a *deus ex machina*.

[32] Cf. Foley (above, note 1) 133: "In this sacrifice divine command and human action coincide, as they initially fail to do elsewhere in the action." Foley discusses the action in relation to the choral odes and concludes that his sacrifice "finds a place in this world [i.e., the world of the first stasimon] made by and for the beautiful dances of maidens, a world of ritual activity and poetic performance in which

but unlike Oedipus, with whom the chorus has repeatedly linked Menoeceus, who tried to resist the oracles pertaining to him, and unlike Creon, who flatly refused to obey them, Menoeceus embraces the oracle's message. He refuses to flee and in the presence of his community, for which he now dies, he thrusts his sword through his neck (*xiphos laimon diēke* 1092). The messenger devotes but two lines to the noble act of Menoeceus, while the rest of his speech describes the individual battles at each gate. Menoeceus obeyed the oracle, and the promise of victory was fulfilled.

Many interpreters of the play suggest that Menoeceus' act lacks significant or even recognizable effect on the future safety of the city.[33] Indeed, after the first victory Polyneices and Eteocles kill each other, Jocasta kills herself, myriads of Argives and Thebans die, etc. Although Menoeceus believes that by killing himself he will purge the country of its sickness, "the rest of the play shows that this hope is empty; ... though victory is gained, the royal house is destroyed."[34] The irony is evident, because the royal house is the State, and the self-destruction of the one can only detract from the victory of the other, and here, the motif of sacrifice that saves the city is submerged in the continuing pollution of Thebes' royal family. However, to claim the self-sacrifice fails because a battle ensues misunderstands both the nature of the sacrifice and what saving the city means. Thebes, in fact, survives. Its citizens are not massacred, its women and children are not enslaved, and its cults continue. Teiresias clearly distinguishes between the loss of life in battle and the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices and the destruction of the city (884–5). Menoeceus' self-sacrifice emblemizes the sacrifice of the house of Cadmus. Thebes survives precisely because the polluting royal family is wiped out. The oracle states that one or the other but not both may survive.

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violence is repressed or given meaning as part of a divinely inspired order" (138). However, the more immediate context of the second and third stasima suggest the interpretation offered here.

[33] See, e.g., Vellacott (above, note 1) 198, 199: "the question whether his sacrifice brought any good to his country is... obscure, and... disregarded..." and "the sublimity of the self-sacrifice, for the necessity of which there is no evidence whatever, is swallowed in the flood of despair and death which covers Thebes after the invading army has dispersed"; Conacher (above, note 25) 241: "As far as one can judge from the text, Menoeceus' self-sacrifice has no discernible effect on the fortunes of the city"; or Foley (above, note 1) 109f: "Menoeceus, having died gloriously according to the account of the chorus, but with uncertain effect in the action, leaves the audience in doubt as to what meaning to confer on his ritual sacrifice" (110).

[34] Vellacott (above, note 1) 199.

Menoeceus nobly chooses the greater good. Like Antigone, Menoeceus kills himself to maintain noble ideals of courage and patriotism, and to show obedience to a higher authority. Ironically, though, Menoeceus inverts an essential element of the oracle, the demand for a "sacrifice" with its implied liminality, by committing suicide, which conflates the boundary between sacrifice and sacrificer.[35]

Sacrifice itself puts humans in an ambiguous position,[36] because it is an act of murder that requires the consent of the victim in order for the murderer to be absolved of guilt. The victim also must be of a significant and pure status, so that the sacrificer as representative of the community can identify himself with the sacrifice. In effect, this type of victim becomes a *pharmakos*, one life given for the continued well-being of many. At the same time a strong border between sacrificer and victim must be maintained. The issue becomes even more complicated in Euripides' play because Teiresias asks for a human sacrifice,[37] and human beings possess the ability to choose. In human sacrifice, victim consent sublimates into considered action and a rationale must be provided. Menoeceus' motivation derives from the oracle and his noble sense of patriotic duty. Whereas Creon flatly refuses to sacrifice the victim, Menoeceus commits suicide, confident that he is fulfilling the oracle. Both make a decision concerning the oracle, but both also disobey it. While Creon does so fully cognizant of his action, Menoeceus unwittingly defies the prophecy by combining two important components of a sacrifice: sacrificer and victim. The boundary between victim and sacrificer that is necessary for an efficacious sacrifice disappears. Many scholars note the perversion in tragedy of actual sacrificial practice by the substitution

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[35] On the importance of liminality for efficacy of sacrifice see W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979) 67ff; Versnel (above, note 1) 150f; and Roussel (above, note 1). This paradoxical admixture of sacrificer with sacrifice is also felt in the Iphigenia story, where the sacrifice of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* becomes the sacrificer in the *Iphigenia among the Taurians.*

[36] See Burkert, *Structure* (above, note 35); and R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore and London 1977).

[37] This causes scholars embarrassment. In fact, R. Rebuffat, "Le Sacrifice du fils de Créon dans les '*Phéniciennes*' d'Euripide," *REA* 74 (1972) 14–31, suggests that by creating a chorus of Phoenician women, representatives of a nation for which human sacrifice was a real practice, Euripides removes the abominable practice from Athenian reality. Fortunately, the sort of specific contemporary influence on Euripides that Rebuffat espouses no longer dominates Euripidean criticism, although this particular play lends itself to such an interpretation. See, e.g., J. de Romilly, "*Phoenician Women* of Euripides: Topicality in Greek Tragedy," *Bucknell Review* 15.3 (1967) 108–32.

of the human for the animal.[38] Yet no one has observed the further paradox created when sacrificer and victim merge. The suicide allows the survival of Thebes, but represents the destruction of the royal Cadmean house. The chorus articulates the close connection of the affairs of the royal house with the fate of the city in the third stasimon, where it relates Menoeceus' death to Cadmus' defeat of Ares' dragon and Oedipus' triumph over the sphinx, both "saving" acts that eventually cursed Thebes. Creon refuses to realize that Menoeceus' suicide benefits the state: at l. 1310 he articulates only personal grief at the loss whereas in ll. 1340ff, after he has heard about the deaths of Jocasta, Polyneices and Eteocles, he laments for himself *and* the state. He is unable to separate the welfare of his family from that of the state, although Menoeceus' suicide seems precisely to have done so.

The Menoeceus episode gains further dramatic relevance by this interpretation. Though the sacrifice occurs, it modulates into a suicide, and so the outcome also must be modified. The glory of the victory vanishes, and Euripides seems to invite the audience to question the validity not so much of human sacrifice, which occurs only in a confused manner and, at any rate, was an issue of little real concern to a fifth-century audience,[39] but instead of Menoeceus' and the chorus' implicit belief that self-sacrifice is purely and simply a desirable act with no personal repercussions. Menoeceus takes his patriotism to excess, and though it gives him a personal honor, preserves his courage, and saves his community, it simultaneously destroys his own family.

Children of Heracles

The self-sacrifice of Macaria differs significantly from Menoeceus'. Menoeceus primarily displays his altruistic tendences toward his city, while Macaria's primary concerns are for her blocked future. The

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[38] See, e.g., Foley (above, note 1).

[39] Except for the possibly historic case of human sacrifice before the battle of Salamis reported by Phainias. For a discussion, see A. Heinrichs, "Human Sacrifice in Greek Religion," in *Entretiens* XXVII (above, note 1) 208–24, and his references. He concludes that the report "belongs to the realm of fiction" because the Athenians had taken no Persian prisoners before the battle, and knew no Dionysos Omestes who was allegedly the recipient of the sacrifice. However, as Wilkins (above note 1) points out, the self-sacrifice motif was familiar from myth (178).

oracle in the *Children of Heracles* also differs from the *Phoenician Women* oracle because though specific in its general demand, it is unspecific concerning the means to its fulfillment. Demophon had recourse to several oracles, all of which varied but all of which agreed on one detail: a maiden must be sacrificed to Persephone (400–9). The oracles fail to specify which maiden, and the choice accordingly falls to the characters in the play. Euripides creates considerable dramatic tension while exploring the options: Demophon feels that to sacrifice his child would entail an act beyond the normal rules of *xenia* and what his duty as a protector of suppliants requires, and to force another Athenian to do so would be the act of a lunatic (410–4). The oracles have spurred the Athenians into debate, and since Demophon knows that to pursue the matter will result in civil war, his only solution is to suggest that Iolaus find a different way to comply with the oracles (420–1). The whole premise for a suppliant play seems undercut because Iolaus acknowledges Demophon's constraint and falls into despair (434–42). A glimmer of hope returns to him, though, and he suggests that he himself be sacrificed to save the children (450–3). Demophon points out the illogic of the suggestion, and Iolaus and Demophon find themselves in their previous dilemma, confused by the oracles and full of fear (471–2). Obviously a third party is needed to cut the knot, and Macaria enters.

Iolaus reiterates to her the situation, and with disarming simplicity and ease she volunteers to die (500–1). Her rationale for this offer, however, is not only the youthful idealism and heroism that many scholars stress,[40] but also a realization of the social pressures on her. Macaria is very clear about her position in society. She stresses her noble birth (510, 513), she articulates a woman's role of silence, modesty, and staying at home (476–7), she internalizes the moral precept of help your friends and harm your enemies (500, 522, 530, 532), and she embraces the institution of *xenia* when she calls her sacrifice a *charis* (548), an essential aspect of *xenia* and a word that brings to mind something desirable or joyous.[41] She has internalized all the aspects usually associated with male *aretē* in addition to those associated with female *aretē*. Condemnation for cowardice takes first place in her thoughts (as it did in Menoeceus') of the disadvantages of continued existence; no city would receive the children of Heracles

[40] E.g., Webster, Grube and even Vellacott (191).
[41] See Blundell, (above, note 4) 33.

under its protection if they prove cowards (507ff). Secondly, she contemplates her future, which would be helpless, friendless and unmarried (520ff). Finally, she agrees to die for her brothers because it is to her advantage to do the fairest thing, to leave life with a good reputation (*eukleos lipein bion* 530–4). Her sentiment reminds of us Ajax's maxim. She makes no reference to the demands of the oracles, envisioning her "noble" act as her own. Twice in this speech she refers to the voluntary nature of her decision, both at the very beginning and the very end, disregarding in effect the constraint imposed by the oracles by ignoring them. She envisions herself as freely renouncing her existence, and yet even this free denial is a result of socialization that has led her on this path of reasoning.

Accepting the suitability of a daughter of Heracles for the sacrifice, Iolaus nevertheless suggests that the actual victim would be designated more fairly by casting lots (543–5). By so doing, he expresses the need to figure out more clearly the divine will behind the oracles.[42] Iolaus wisely cautions Macaria, but she refuses outright because she discerns no nobility in dying by constraint (548–51). Iolaus realizes he can neither object to her decision nor compel her to die (555), and she relieves him from guilt by emphasizing again her free will in the decision (557–8). In any sacrifice the consent of the victim is an essential part because it releases the sacrificer from pollution.[43] Consent, though, differs greatly from insistence, and only humans can insist on an action.

Euripides does not, however, leave us to decide whether Macaria should be analyzed as a "noble suicide" based on her intent only. Although Macaria is willing to submit herself to the sacrificial knife (561), Iolaus refuses to witness it and, accordingly, she then asks to die among women (566). Macaria's vocabulary is revealing. She speaks of "breathing out her life" (*ekpneusai bion* 566). Euripides uses this phrase one other time, in his *Helen*. At l. 142 Teucer tells Helen that an alternate version of the death of Castor and Pollux is that they committed suicide (*ekpneusai bion*).[44] Euripides employs the very similar phrase *psychēn ekpneusai* in the *Orestes* at l. 1163 when Orestes

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[42] Roussel (above, note 1) rightly stresses this factor. In Herodotus Croesus erred by failing to requestion the oracle for specific details.

[43] Ibid., 235.

[44] Euripides may have invented this variant of the death of the Dioscuri, and his choice of vocabulary for it is interesting. See A.M. Dale, ed., *Helen* (Oxford 1967) ad loc.

realizes that he must die. In Sophocles' *Ajax* Teucer uses the word *ekpneusai* when he discovers Ajax's body. The phrase that Macaria speaks, then, is pregnant with associations of acceptance of the inevitability of death at the very least as in the *Orestes*, but even more of suicide as in the *Helen* and the *Ajax*. The vocabulary accordingly argues for an analysis of her death as a noble suicide, at least in terms of her perception of the event.[45]

Emphasizing again her losses, Macaria delivers her final words. She pathetically dwells on the relinquishing of her prime, her chance of marriage and her life (579–84). If the gods grant the suppliants relief, then they must remember to give her proper burial because she surrendered her life for theirs (586–90). She ends her speech with complete fatalism, hoping for no afterlife: if Hades exists, then troubles continue and death does not, as they claim, cure everything (592–6). Her motives for wishing to die are primarily personal and, like Polyxena's, fatalistic, mixed with some altruism. Her concerns are for her blocked future, whether she should continue to live or whether she should die.

Iolaus, not Macaria, stresses the theme that an oracle demands the death and concludes that although Macaria's death is sad, to disobey the oracles would be worse still (605–7). The chorus, too, realizes the divine dimension behind the action, for without the gods, a person neither attains happiness nor falls ill-fated (608–9). It advises Iolaus to endure the oracles without faltering, and to accept without grieving the renown of Macaria's death (619–22). This choral praise constitutes the last mention of Macaria; throughout the rest of the play she recedes into oblivion. The efficacy of her death becomes a nonissue, and her scene one of pathos.[46]

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[45] The absence of any description of her actual death in the play creates problems in interpretation, and critics either remain silent about the scene or invent a scene. M. Schmidt, in *Gestalt und Geschichte. Festschrift Karl Shefold. AK*, Supplement 4 (1967) 176, pl. 10, and "Makaria" *AK* 13 (1970) 71ff, pl. 33–4, concludes that the Apulian volute krater at Bari, Museo Nazionale 3648, dated ca. 360 B.C., represents the *Heracleidae* story of Euripides. One frame of this vase depicts two heroes carrying a maiden off from an altar that has a flame. Blood from a neck wound flows over her chest. Schmidt believes this is Macaria. Lack of textual support, though, makes this suggestion a conjecture on a conjecture. Since Macaria dies among women, who do not usually perform blood sacrifices, we might conjecture just as easily that she, like Menoeceus, actually kills herself.

[46] So Kitto, *GT* (above, note 1) 255. Scholars, e.g., U. von Wilamowitz, "Excurse zu Euripides' *Herakliden*," *Hermes* 17 (1882) 338–52, have postulated a lost scene of lament for her death, but Euripides' real purpose is better served by the text as it stands. Kitto, for example, feels that Euripides keeps Macaria in the dark before her

Euripides has portrayed Macaria in part as an altruistic and idealistic character, but more so as a victim of violence who longs for death to rid herself of an unpromising life. Euripides confronts his characters with an oracle that demands a human sacrifice for victory. The human who sacrifices herself actually ignores the oracle; it is of very little significance to her personal situation. She resigns herself to a noble suicide, though her act was not in the first instance one of youthful idealism with its implications of absolute recognition of traditional values in one's society and an unselfish patriotism, even though it was perceived in this way by the other characters in the play. Macaria did not submit herself to death out of obedience or unswerving loyalty to any divine order, although the other interested parties allowed her death because they felt a need to obey the oracles and to maintain social equilibrium. By depicting a discontinuity between the other characters' perceptions and the principal player's motives, Euripides seems not only to question the idea of self-sacrifice, but also the validity of both the oracle's and society's demand and the incorrectly perceived compliance.

The issue of compliance or noncompliance with certain oracles occurs in Herodotus too,[47] and apparently posed a question of interest to Euripides and his audience. In the *Children of Heracles* Iolaus touches upon the possibility of disobeying an oracle, but unfortunately for Macaria, he rejects it. In the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, obedience to oracles becomes an issue of central concern.

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scene and lets her recede into the background afterwards "to prevent our taking an interest exclusively in her personal fate." (255). If so, then Euripides creates a great deal of irony by his treatment of her and her own insistence on her personal loss. The audience along with the chorus and Iolaus perhaps relate to her act as one of public heroism, but Macaria herself, as I have attempted to demonstrate, reasonably perceives it primarily in noble yet personal terms.

Z. Petre, "La Représentation de la mort dans la tragédie grecque," *StCl* 23 (1985) 21–35, observes that where we might expect a description of the sacrifice of Macaria we instead hear about the miracle which rejuvenates Iolaus.

[47] The significant aspect of some Herodotean examples of oracles comes from the necessity of human action for their fulfillment. Prophecy does not exclude human action; it requires it [B.M.W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven 1957) 35ff]. An obvious example of an oracle that requires human action is one which offers alternatives. Herodotus records in 7.220 that the Spartans knew at the outset of the Persian war that either their city must be destroyed by the foreigner or a Spartan king be killed. The patriotic Leonidas dismissed the largest part of the troops at Thermopylae, and he and the remaining 300 perished at the hands of the Persians, by that satisfying one option given by the oracle by his conscious choice.

On occasion one can misunderstand the prophecy. The most famous case of a misinterpreted prophecy is that which resulted in the downfall of Croesus. Herodotus

Iphigenia in Aulis

The oracle pronounced by Calchas controls much of the action and dramatic movement of the *Iphigenia in Aulis.* The oracle is related in the prologue by Agamemnon to the audience in simple terms: according to Calchas the calm that delays the whole army at Aulis can only be changed by the sacrifice of Iphigenia to Artemis (88–94). However, the oracle as a behavior directing force gains a life of its own to be manipulated by various characters for their own purposes. Agamemnon's first reaction, he tells us, was to assert his freedom by refusing the demand (95–6). His supposed freedom proves only an illusion, not in the Aeschylean and Sophoclean sense that a higher authority controls the outcome, but since Calchas, Odysseus and

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in 1.53 relates that the oracles told Croesus that if he attacked the Persians he would destroy a mighty empire. Although Croesus elaborately tested different oracles to find the most reliable, he failed to interpret correctly—through his own fault (1.91)—the response to his question concerning the outcome of the war, and later Apollo scolds him for failing to ask further questions to discover the details.

A prophecy can be misunderstood *and* understood simultaneously. Herodotus (7.141–2) thoroughly details the two responses to the wooden wall oracle concerning Athens. The Athenians who chose to remain and defend the acropolis thinking that they had correctly understood the message of the oracle in fact misunderstood the oracle and so perished, whereas Themistocles properly interpreted the response and prevailed. This is also a case where one oracle is rejected and another demanded.

Herodotus also gives examples of oracles that have been forgotten or disregarded. Croesus had to be reminded that vengeance would fall in the fifth generation after Gyges (1.91). Ironically, for oracles take precedence even over the wishes of the gods, Apollo could not avert the punishment from Croesus. Greeks were also susceptible to forgetfulness: in 8.96 Herodotus records that after the battle of Salamis many oracles were fulfilled, including one spoken many years before which predicted that Colian women would use oars for roasting their food. Though forgotten, it was to happen all the same.

One might attempt to defy an oracle or to prove it false. Mycerinus of Egypt, (2.133) after learning from an oracle that he was to live for only six more years, had innumerable lamps lit every night so that he could turn his six years into twelve by turning night into day.

Herodotus produces one instance of an oracle that is given to someone other than the person concerned. In 6.19 he relates that when the Argives were consulting the Delphic oracle about the safety of their city a response was given that not only answered their immediate concern but also contained an additional passage about Miletus. Although the Milesians lacked foreknowledge of their predicted doom, it came about nonetheless. Herodotus indeed gives us a complicated picture of oracles: they may be ambiguous or obscure; they may be clear about the outcome, but not about the specific details; they may be forgotten or ignored; one may undertake to thwart their fulfillment; one may be unaware of an oracle; or oracles may force humans to make choices. Each of these aspects requires human participation and therefore provides humans in some cases with flexibility and freedom in their actions.

Menelaus, the only other Achaeans who know the prophecy (106), will play their parts in the fulfillment of the sacrifice. In other words, the oracle represents what society desires despite the individual deprivation it may cause. Menelaus works on Agamemnon's ambition (338ff), while Calchas and Odysseus hold the power to spread the particulars of the oracle among the army that would in turn create rebellion among the troops and deprive Agamemnon of his supreme command (516–7; 524). Of these two Odysseus holds the greater dread, for both Menelaus and Agamemnon agree that Calchas can easily be murdered (518–9), since, Agamemnon concludes, the whole race of prophets is a curse upon the earth (520–1), and Menelaus finds prophets of no use whatsoever to man (522–3). Achilles condemns prophets as well: if they are lucky, they hit upon a little truth amidst their lies; if unlucky, like smoke they are nothing (954–7). Clytemnestra suggests that Agamemnon could have exercised some control over the oracle by commanding the army to cast lots to see whose daughter should die (1196–9). The chorus condemns the demand of the goddess most incisively when, commenting on Iphigenia's transformation, it credits her with nobility, but blames fate and Artemis for sickness (1402–3). Although the oracle becomes its own entity in the hands of these characters, it gains an equivocal existence, and responsibility for its fulfillment rests on the human agents.[48] In other words, each character seems to recognize an element of freedom in choosing to obey or disobey the oracles, as each individual possesses a certain amount of freedom of choice while functioning as an ethical being. More so than in the other plays under discussion here, this play depicts a sick society whose preservation depends on the self-sacrifice of a young girl.

The oracle takes on a less specific and broader dimension for Iphigenia because she understands it not with the objectivity of the other characters, but with the natural subjectivity of the intended victim. For this reason, it becomes a matter of personal fate for Iphigenia; she places emphasis on the question of fate without even mentioning the particular oracle, and consigns herself to death more from grandiose illusions of service to society than from obedience to the oracle per se. She acknowledges only the divine will of Artemis behind the oracle, once during her lament for herself (1311–2), and again after her conversion (1394–7). What in the first instance terri-

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[48] Vellacott (above, note 1) 49.

fies her, in the second reminds her of her proper place in the cosmos, namely, a mortal's place. She salvages what she can of the situation for her glory (1397–9; 1439–41), and in her euphoric state[49] pardons Agamemnon and tries to smooth his way by forgiving him and by soliciting Clytemnestra's pardon for him as well. But by bypassing the specific oracle of Calchas she raises herself above the mean-spirited ambition of the other "heroes" of the play, and seems to find a larger and more noble perspective. The problem with her conversion, though, is that the rest of the play undermines the concept of war, and though Iphigenia believes she acts according to the notion of nobility, Euripides makes clear that the path she opens by her death is one that should or could have been avoided, mythic demands aside. Euripides has again, as in the *Children of Heracles*, undermined both the demand of the oracle and the self-sacrifice, the former by presenting the one who eventually complies with the demand in the first instance as unconcerned with it, and the latter by keeping the "self-sacrifice" questionable in terms of motives and suitability of victim.

Marriage imagery plays a significant role in the *IA*.[50] and Iphigenia is called to her sacrifice in Aulis by her father under the pretext of becoming the wife of Achilles. Clytemnestra and Iphigenia arrive in a chariot and rest in the meadow by the stream where they bathe (413ff). The messenger, assuming from their garb that they have come for a marriage (433–9), announces their arrival to Agamemnon, who responds pathetically to the news and fears to look upon them, ashamed of his deceit. He expresses his realization of the paradox he has created for the maiden Iphigenia with the Bride of Hades motif, for though a maiden now soon Hades will marry her (460–1). Agamemnon's about-face on Iphigenia's maidenhood expresses more than a simple variation on the marriage with Hades theme; rather, in her sacrificial death Iphigenia will lose her virginity.[51] Certainly the erotic aspect of the metaphor is latent in Agamemnon's words, and there is much emphasis throughout the drama on Iphigenia's

[49] What I call euphoria has been called self-delusion and suppression by e.g., H. Siegel, "Self-Delusion and the Volte-face of Iphigenia in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*," *Hermes* 108 (1980) 300–21, and S.E. Lawrence, "*Iphigenia at Aulis*: Characterization and Psychology in Euripides," *Ramus* 17 (1988) 91–109.

[50] For a sustained discussion of the marriage imagery, see Foley (above, note 1).

[51] Loraux (above, note 1) 48, has a very interesting discussion of the self-sacrifice victims who "lose their virginity" at the moment of sacrifice. The discussion is complementary to mine in pointing out the erotic nature of the act, but her general con-

physical beauty and her desirability as a wife, the "allure of sex."[52] It is of course consistent with Agamemnon's ambitious character to see his daughter in terms of her marriageability, even if the husband will be Hades, but the metaphor retains its poignancy even in his mouth.

Upon Agamemnon's sorrowful display, Menelaus relents in his demand for Iphigenia's death. They both realize that compulsion is on them to obey the oracle because of the *mania* of the army,[53] and so the deceit must continue. Agamemnon instructs Menelaus to keep Clytemnestra from learning about the sacrifice until he gives his daughter as a wife to Hades (540). The similarities of the rituals of sacrifice and marriage that Euripides stresses allow Agamemnon to see to fruition his odious plan.

The chorus announces the approach of mother and bride, and the bride is lifted from the chariot onto the ground. The ensuing dialogues between Agamemnon and Iphigenia and Agamemnon and Clytemnestra underline the "ironic disparity between the perspectives of the two characters."[54] Iphigenia, full of love, exemplifies "the pathos of youth, of family love, of bodily tenderness, of early memories, of tears, of the love of life and light,"[55] and she worries only about separation from her father. Clytemnestra emerges as a mother intent upon her child's married happiness. Agamemnon's cleverness and command of ambiguity is underscored by the innocence of one and the trust of the other. However, Iphigenia's betrothal to Achilles has already compromised her innocence.[56] Haemon in the *Phoenician Women* is an unsuitable victim because he had already been engaged to Antigone. Pausanias tells the story of Aristodemus (4.9.2–10), whose daughter cannot be sacrificed because a Messenian claims to be en-

clusion based on this observation is that the poet is underlining the deviance inherent in human sacrifice. My conclusion is that Euripides means us to question the whole concept of "self-sacrifice," in light of fifth-century ethical constructs.

52 R. Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (Ann Arbor, MI 1964) 48–9 and n. 49.

53 Vellacott (above, note 1) bases his interpretation of this play on the *mania* that has rippled through the army since they learned of the oracle demanding a human sacrifice. This is indicative of a corrupt society, in which "a destructive pattern of events, once set in motion, advances automatically, fuelled by the self-interest of numerous individuals, towards its prepared conclusion, regardless of the presence or absence of any rational motive" (174).

54 Foley (above, note 1) 72.

55 Vellacott (above, note 1) 46.

56 See especially J. Redfield, "Notes on the Greek Wedding," *Arethusa* 15 (1982) 181–201, on the two parts of the marriage ceremony, *enguē* and *gamos*.

gaged to her.[57] Foley suggests that the audience also would presume that Iphigenia, given her entrance as a wreathed bride, had dedicated her childhood toys to the gods, a preliminary to the marriage ritual.[58] Euripides invites the audience to question her suitability as a sacrificial victim, which must be pure, i.e., virginal, and consenting.

In the context of this anomaly, Euripides introduces Achilles, another victim of Agamemnon's ambition. The meeting of Clytemnestra and Achilles forms a pivotal scene, for here both learn of Agamemnon's treachery.[59] Achilles, at first upset only because he was used as bait without his consent (959ff), assumes Iphigenia's cause and agrees to defend her no matter what the cost. The action of the play from this point leads to a confrontation between Achilles and Agamemnon, a familiar literary theme since the *Iliad.* Achilles accepts his betrothal to Iphigenia and further compromises her position as a sacrificial victim. Then, in the ensuing choral ode, Iphigenia is compared not to a domestic animal, i.e., a proper sacrificial animal, but to a mountain calf (1080–2).[60]

Iphigenia's story is "pathetic and dramatic"[61] in a way similar to pitiful Macaria's story: Macaria and Iphigenia both focus on personal considerations.[62] Having learned Agamemnon's intentions toward her, Iphigenia begs and implores him to let her live (1218ff). She appeals to him on the very personal level of daughter to father with no reference to the seer's demand, perhaps because at this point in the play she does not even know about the oracle. More likely, Euripides omits any references to the oracles by Iphigenia to stress her very subjective and personal attitude toward her situation. In contrast to Iphigenia, Agamemnon, when at last he attempts to justify to her his reasons for summoning her to Aulis for sacrifice, frames

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[57] See P. Roussel, "Le rôle d'Achille dans l'*Iphigénie à Aulis,*" *REG* 28 (1915) 240–4.

[58] Foley (above, note 1) 73.

[59] This scene is also pivotal in a consideration of *aidōs*, because Achilles uses the word to describe a purely conventional external situation, whereas Clytemnestra uses it to describe her inner shame. So D.B. Lombard, "Aspects of *AIDŌS* in Euripides," *Acta Classica* 28 (1985) 6–7.

[60] See Loraux (above, note 1) 34. Again as in the case of Menoeceus, according to Loraux, the comparison underlines the deviance inherent in human sacrifice.

[61] Kitto, *GT* (above, note 1) 369. And see also B. Snell, "From Tragedy to Philosophy: *Iphigenia in Aulis,*" original title "Euripides' aulische Iphigenie," trans. W. Moskalew, from "Aischylos und das Handeln im Drama," *Philologus*, Supplementband 20 Heft 1 (1928) 148–60.

[62] Grube (above, note 1) 434.

it with references to the oracle. Compulsion (*dei*) was upon him to do as Calchas said, to sacrifice her (1258–63). Passion has seized the army, and the soldiers will ravage Argos instead of Troy if he does not submit to the will of the goddess (1264–8). All Greece demands the sacrifice, despite how Agamemnon feels (1271–2). He concludes by contrasting their slavery to fate with the need for Greece to be free (1273–5).

Responding in a monody to the immediate situation, Iphigenia instantly concedes that fate, although she makes no specific reference to the oracle, is upon her, and she will die (1279–81). She grieves for her personal fate, although she attempts to envision it as part of the progression of events, which originated with the birth of Paris and culminated in his judgement of beauty (1285ff). Nonetheless, the realization of her individual doom preoccupies her, and the central part of her monody focuses on Agamemnon's betrayal of her (1312–8). Miserable fate, which Agamemnon suggested to her was the motivating force, consumes her all the way through to the end of the monody (1330–5). Susceptible to suggestions in her innocence and inexperience, Iphigenia laments her fate, and though she struggles to understand it in larger terms,[63] always returns to its impact on her as an individual.

Yet, unlike Macaria, Iphigenia at last does transcend her personal predicament, and the inconsistency in her character that such an attempt entails has brought censure on Euripides' technique from Aristotle (*Poetics* 1454a32) on.[64] Iphigenia effects a transition, but only after listening to Achilles and Clytemnestra discuss her escape from doom, and after a new situation has presented itself, one in which heroics are viable. Achilles exemplifies his *aretē* by offering to defend her no matter what the cost. Achilles, of course, has been reared under the heroic code that embraces glorious death, and such his death would be if he should die defending his honor and Iphigenia, whereas Iphigenia has not been trained to take an active role in

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[63] Ibid., 435, contends that Iphigenia begins to depersonalize her predicament in her monody (1278ff) because she reflects on her own personal fate as a part of the larger scheme of things. But this effort of hers in the monody is feeble and unsuccessful.

[64] See S.E. Lawrence (above, note 49) and his "Psychology in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*," *Prudentia* 21 (1989) 4–13, for a discussion of the many attitude changes which affect most of the major characters in the play. Iphigenia is not alone in this, and the transformation occurs because she finds herself in a completely new situation. See also M. McDonald, "Iphigenia's *Philia*: Motivation in Euripides' *Iphigenia at*

perpetuating the heroic code. Having listened to Achilles' resolve to defend her, Iphigenia has a sudden turn of mind and, contrary to our expectations, now resolves to die gloriously (1375–6).[65] Her change of mind interrupts the course of the action: there will be no confrontation between Agamemnon and Achilles. Iphigenia, like Polyxena, does not merely consent to her death; now she demands it.[66] The public glory of Greece is of more moment than her individual existence. "She becomes . . . a bride, not of Hades, but of all Greece,"[67] and this integration is accomplished by her altruistic "noble suicide."

Agamemnon cannot bear the notion of murdering his daughter so he couches it in terms acceptable not only to himself, but also to Iphigenia, Clytemnestra, Achilles and the Greek army. By signifying her as a "Bride," he allows her to come of age, albeit in her death, and to be integrated into the public world. The paradox inherent in the motif underscores Iphigenia's paradox: a shy and unsuitable victim becomes the savior of Greece and allows the army to wreak havoc on an innocent city, and to avenge the adulterous Helen.[68]

Euripides handles Iphigenia's acceptance of the role as savior ironically. As long as she shrank from dying, she also refused to accept the words of Calchas as a divine order. Now, grandiosely, she refuses to oppose the divine will since she is a mere mortal (1394–7).

Aulis," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 63 (1990) 69–84, who states that Agamemnon and Menelaus also change their minds "quickly out of weakness; Iphigenia's change seems, instead, to come out of heroic *philia*" (77). D. Chant, "Role Inversion and its Function in the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*," *Ramus* 15 (1986) 83–92 discusses the changes in Agamemnon, Menelaus and Achilles and suggests that "the literary mechanism by which such characterisations are established is simple enough—duplicity and hypocrisy is indicated by the vacillations and reversals of adopted roles. But these vacillations and reversals function as part of a greater pattern of undermining and instability, of deceptions, seeming and uncertainty . . ." (83).

[65] See Foley (above, note 1) 67 n. 4.

[66] See W.D. Smith, "Iphigenia in Love," *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M.W. Knox*, edd. G.W. Bowersock, W. Burkert and M.C.J. Putnam (Berlin 1979) 173–80, for an interpretation of the love element involved in the encounter between Achilles and Iphigenia. He argues that Iphigenia's "patriotic" reasons for wishing to die are specious and result from her love for Achilles. Unfortunately, the text does not seem to support his claims. McDonald (above, note 64) 78, suggests that the Euripidean Iphigenia "alludes to her weaker Aeschylean counterpart by refusing to be sacrificed, and then acts all the more nobly when she has weighed the data and come to a more informed decision."

[67] Foley (above, note 1) 69.

[68] Vellacott (above, note 1) 219ff, stresses the aspects of slavery and freedom in the play, and points out the irony in the Greek situation.

I am not arguing here for a pacifistic Euripides, but in this play at least he undercuts the glory of war.

Euripides has portrayed Agamemnon in the play with not only the power to disobey Calchas whose clairvoyance is assumed to be valid, but also the duty to disobey him.[69] Up to this point, Iphigenia seems by ignoring the oracle to be doing precisely what Agamemnon should have been doing, i.e., disobeying Calchas. But in her switch from helpless victim to deliverer of Greece, she implicitly falls back on one of Agamemnon's assumptions, namely, the validity of Calchas' predictions. She also consigns herself to a less individualistic stance as an expendable part of society. By removing herself from life she ensures that Greek society, sick though it is, will survive.

Iphigenia had lamented her fate because it would cut short her life and leave her unmarried forever and childless (1223ff). After her "conversion," the destruction of Troy will be her children and her marriage (1398ff). Again, she has taken up another assumption of her father, that the destruction of Troy is necessary and desirable, but it has assumed an almost macabre dimension as death and destruction become substitutes for life and growth.

The freedom of Greece had been of little concern to her; now Greek freedom takes a prominent place in her reverie: it is reasonable that the Greeks who are free should rule barbarians who are slaves (1399ff). There is, in fact, nothing reasonable about her final assertion, for throughout the play the Greek male characters have proven to be slaves to ambition, greed and selfishness.[70] In this play about war, nothing is what it seems.[71] Though referring to the confusion between slavery and freedom, nowhere does this statement ring more truly than about the heroism of Iphigenia.

Her conversion is unexpected; her reasons for it are not her own but Agamemnon's. The very idea that her death might be heroic comes from the example of Achilles, and though her death may be noble, her motivations are grounded in ignoble assumptions. Euripides goes even further in his ironic treatment, though, by compromising her status as a suitable victim. Euripides has postulated a situation of war in which an unjust demand is leveled (human sacrifice) to ensure an equally unjust result (destruction of a city). The demand comes to fruition through self-seeking, ambitious politicians by means of the conversion of a meek and ill-equipped character. At each point

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[69] Ibid., 222.
[70] Ibid., 221.
[71] Ibid., 174.

Euripides has clearly shown that characters had a choice in the proceedings, and just as much as Agamemnon, Menelaus or Odysseus may have erred in their choices, so the poet suggests that Iphigenia also erred in hers. Euripides depicts the "cause" as brutal and inequitable and the society as ailing; one who furthers an unjust cause, though believing herself to act patriotically and under the influence of *philia*,[72] acts rashly.

Hecuba

In the *Hecuba* the whole world suffers demoralization; all is left to chance.[73] Hecuba's response to this realization is revenge and

[72] McDonald (above, note 64) concludes that Iphigenia's *philia* shows that "she is not dying so much for an idea, but rather those she loves, and in this is indicative of a new type of heroism validating a cooperative relationship as an element of stability in an unstable universe" (84). However, McDonald has not taken into account the importance of the oracle in the action of the play.

[73] Because the *Hecuba* is a diptych and therefore seems disjointed, commentators search for unifying themes. See, e.g., Conacher (above, note 25) 146–65, for a summary of the problem; or more recently, A.N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison 1987) 131–5; D. Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse* (Baltimore and London 1987); and M. Heath, "'Jure Principem Locum Tenet': Euripides' *Hecuba*," *BICS* 34 (1987) 43ff., 60ff. Themes include human suffering [so Kitto, *GT* (above, note 1) 216–23]; human suffering and the examination of *nomos* [G.M. Kirkwood, "Hecuba and Nomos," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 61–8]; the logic of political necessity [W. Arrowsmith, introduction to translation in *The Complete Greek Tragedies, Euripides V*, edd. D. Grene and R. Lattimore (Chicago 1958) 84–9]; the contrast between Greek and barbarian [Kovacs, 77–114]; or the experience of Hecuba who is central to the entire play [L.E. Matthaei, *Studies in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1918) 118–57]. Other scholars focus on human helplessness in the wake of excessive suffering and how actions arise from this helpless state [J. de Romilly, *L'Évolution du pathetique d'Eschyle à Euripide* (Paris 1961, reprint 1980) 80ff; 114ff]. K.J. Reckford, ["Concepts of Demoralization in the *Hecuba*," in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, ed. P. Burian (Durham 1985) 112–28] examines the play in the context of the fifth-century Sophists. According to his interpretation, Hecuba wants to believe in the permanence of nobility, of *phusis*, but in the end learns that "the soul, like the body, is corruptible" (117). [For the Sophists in general see W.K.C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy* II (Cambridge 1965) 340, 353–4, 495–6, and III (1969) chapter 4.] M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge 1986) 397–421, also examines the concept of convention in mutability in human affairs. C. Segal, "Violence and the Other: Greek, Female, and Barbarian in Euripides' *Hecuba*," *TAPA* 120 (1990) 109–31, explores the interconnections between war, monstrosity, barbarian violence, women and eroticism, and finds that "Euripides creates a remarkable new kind of tragedy, bringing together the mythical elements of prophecy, metamorphosis, and monstrosity with debates on law, punishment, justice, friendship, and moral universals" (124).

dehumanization; Polyxena's is nobility in voluntary death.[74] In sociological terms a demoralized and random world necessarily results from social disruption. The contrast between Hecuba and Polyxena is highlighted because they find themselves at opposite ends of a continuum: Hecuba feels the loss of all societal bounds; her disregard for these bounds is explicit in 864ff where she concedes that all men are slaves of money or chance, that all men must conform to public opinion from fear of prosecution. She therefore asks from Agamemnon only his passive support,[75] for she alone will orchestrate her revenge on Polymestor because implicitly she is not bound to the same conformity. Polyxena, on the other hand, is crushed by excessive boundaries with her future pitilessly blocked, and though born a princess and reared to marry kings, she is now a slave, with no freedom from drudgery (352ff). Her only freedom exists in death,[76] for she sees no hope in this life and nothing at all worth living for (370–1).

The play presents the steps to her death in terms of a sacrificial ritual. Because her virginity and noble birth render her a suitable victim, she is selected as a prize of honor for the grave of Achilles (222). She is adorned with a shroud and led to the sacrificer (432). However, she herself alters the third step of the sacrificial pattern by refusing to let anyone touch her (548). A sacrificial victim must be submissive and this submission is communicated through the laying on of hands.[77] Polyxena, it is true, gives her consent, or rather insists

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[74] R. Meridor, "Hecuba's Revenge. Some Observations on Euripides' *Hecuba*," *AJP* 99 (1978) 28–35, argues that Hecuba's revenge is an official act of justice compatible with fifth-century attitudes, and consequently does not place her outside civilized society. However, her status as a slave hardly gives her the right to exact penalty. See also A.W.H. Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* n.s. 16 (1966) 193–219, who shows that even though Hecuba claims to be a *philē* of Odysseus, she is not a *philē* of the Greeks as a whole, nor does she have the proper *aretē* to override the demand of Achills. See Conacher (above, note 73) 165, for a discussion of Hecuba's feelings of anomie. C. Segal, "Golden Armor and Servile Robes: Heroism and Metamorphosis in *Hecuba* of Euripides," *AJP* 111 (1990) 304–17, examines both the individual change and social change, and concludes that "the two areas of change work together not only to depict the massive scale of moral decline in this postwar world, but also to show how a corrupt society and brutalizing conditions deform even a noble nature" (304).

[75] For a discussion of Hecuba's use of persuasion to attain Agamemnon's consent, see R.G.A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study in Peitho* (Cambridge 1982) 170–86, esp. 179–81.

[76] For the ideas of slavery and freedom in the *Hecuba*, see W. Steidle, *Studien zum antiken Drama* (Munich 1968) 49–50; and S.G. Daitz, "Concepts of Freedom and Slavery in Euripides' *Hecuba*," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 217–26.

[77] Burkert, *SH* (above, note 35) 67ff; and "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 87–121.

on the deed, but she refuses to die as a victim: since she is royalty she feels shame among the dead if she is called a slave (550–2). Therefore, her type of death may be analyzed as a variant of suicide, a "noble suicide," motivated by fatalistic tendencies because like an actual suicide she freely chooses to die and renounces existence. She does not, however, fit exactly into the category of "self-sacrifice" as she neither sacrifices herself for any greater good (as Menoeceus, Macaria and Iphigenia do), nor will she obtain release for Hecuba or anybody else of her own community.[78] Her motives, even more so than Macaria's, are personal and fatalistic. Her death, however noble, fails to prove the inherent nature and permanence of nobility because the second half of the play portrays the destruction of Hecuba's nobility. She is not a scapegoat, a *pharmakos* used for expiation, and to reiterate, she is far from submissive. At the moment when Neoptolemus must sacrifice her, Polyxena's nobility and courage induce the Greek army to call for and Agamemnon to order her release.[79] Polyxena will have none of it. Instead, refusing to be seized and lifted onto the altar, she offers Neoptolemus a choice: he can stab her in her bared breast or slit her throat (554ff).[80] The latter conforms to sacrificial procedure; the former receives erotic and sensuous detail.[81] In this act Polyxena makes one final assertion of freedom by seeking to alter, ever so subtly, the sacrifice. Neoptolemus chooses the sacrificial mode of slaughter, but even as Polyxena falls dying mindful of her maidenhood, she modestly covers her breast (569–71). Euripides, therefore, by reminding us that Polyxena dies a virgin, recalls a recurrent theme in the first half of his play, marriage.

Polyxena's first argument for wishing to die is that although she was born a princess and reared with hopes of becoming a bride of a king, in fact courted and envied by all, life now means slavery and marriage to some low slave (351ff). Now, though, she longs for death (*thanein eran* 358; note especially the erotic *eran*), and will dedicate herself as a bride to Hades (368).[82] Just before her final exit, Polyxena

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[78] J. Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*, (Ann Arbor 1991) 97, points out that not only is the "communal purpose" of the typical self-sacrificial event missing, but also the "divine request" aspect, because Odysseus, not a god, is the instigator of the sacrifice. Achilles demanded simply a prize, not necessarily a human sacrifice.

[79] For the importance of the group ethos in the play, see Kovac's discussion (above, note 73) esp. 86.

[80] See Loraux (above, note 1) 78; and Kovacs (above, note 73) 95.

[81] See Michelini (above, note 73) 158–70; and Segal, "VO" (above, note 73) 111ff.

laments that she is unmarried to her death, without wedding songs (414, 416), and that she will lie in Hades far from Hecuba (418). Polyxena seems to regret most her loss of freedom, which in practical terms means she cannot marry. The Bride of Hades metaphor as used by Polyxena underscores the irony of her situation: as a maiden her destiny is to marry; because she must die her destiny can only be fulfilled by envisioning a marriage to Hades. This dark image illuminates her role as a helpless and hopeless victim in the face of male violence.[83]

The chorus shares Polyxena's fear of a life of slavery, but reacts very differently, as the first stasimon shows. This ode[84] is typically Euripidean in its extended descriptive imagery,[85] and derives strength from its visual associations of place. The women imagine far away places and wonder about the quality of their future lives as slaves. In contrast to Polyxena, they will continue to live as slaves, and they choose homes in Europe over the bridal chamber of Hades (479–84). By engaging the metaphor in this contrasting way between would-be similar victims, Euripides underscores the noble and courageous decision of Polyxena.[86]

The first half of the play has centered on the nobility of Polyxena, and the burial ritual for her creates a bridge to the second half of the play in which the baseness of Hecuba is emphasized.[87] Hecuba sees her final act for Polyxena, indeed, her final act of humanity, as an act of a mother for a bride. She requests water from the sea so that she may bathe for the very last time her daughter, the bride who is no bride, the virgin who is not a virgin, and lay her out as she deserves (611–3). In her use of alpha privatives, Hecuba echoes Polyxena's own lament, and the importance of marriage for a young

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[82] W.S. Hadley, ed, *The Hecuba of Euripides* (Cambridge 1894) 60, first calls her one.

[83] So Segal, "VO" (above, note 73) 113.

[84] Barlow (above, note 11) 25.

[85] Ibid., 18.

[86] For a more detailed discussion of the ode, see V. Rosivach, "The First Stasimon of the *Hecuba*, 444ff," *AJP* 96 (1975) 349–62, who concludes that the ode shows that "life need not be seen only in extreme terms [as Polyxena sees it], and that simpler rewards and lesser punishments are possible for the less heroic [the chorus] as well" (362).

[87] Segal, "VO" (above, note 73) 119, concludes that "the contrast between Polyxena's acquiescence and Hecuba's almost demonic skill and resourcefulness in getting revenge shows women polarized between two extremes: Helpless victims... and vengeful, monstrous figures of violence...".

girl is again touched upon. In this one metaphorical image Euripides emphasizes the similarity of the rituals of marriage and burial.

The ritual description also serves a dramatic purpose, since the fetching of water (609–10) functions as the catalyst to the discovery of the corpse of Polydorus. The turning point for Hecuba from a victim to victimizer occurs at the very instant in which she performs her most humane of duties for Polyxena. Euripides uses the Bride of Hades motif that he has worked into the texture of the play at this critical moment to cap the depiction of the suffering Hecuba in a most pathetic way, and to jolt the audience by the contrasting depiction of the revenge-seeking Hecuba.

Alcestis

Euripides' *Alcestis* depicts another kind of martyrdom, but in this play the martyr sacrifices herself not for any good greater than the survival of an individual. The issue of death as a separation from life dominates the action of the play, and the particular kind of death that Alcestis suffers is examined and probed by several characters, mortal and divine, in the play. Death is typically unavoidable, irreversible and, significantly, random, though in the *Alcestis* these aspects of death seem to be suspended. Death from sickness, murder, sacrifice and suicide are all offered as a possible explanation of the manner of Alcestis' death,[88] and each method has its own set of connotations.

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[88] There have been countless critical readings of the *Alcestis*, and the most common is the psychological. See W.D. Smith, "The Ironic Structure of the *Alcestis*," *Phoenix* 14 (1960) 127–45; K. Von Fritz, "Euripides' Alkestis und ihre modernen Nachahmen und Kritiker," in *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 256–321; A.P. Burnett, "The Virtues of Admetus," *CP* 60 (1965) 240–55; M. Lloyd, "Euripides' *Alcestis*," *G&R* 32 (1985) 119–31; and M. Dyson, "Alcestis' Children and the Character of Admetus," *JHS* 108 (1988) 13–23. Thematic studies are also popular. So, for example, marriage [M. Halleran, "Text and Ceremony at the Close of Euripides' *Alcestis*," *Eranos* 86 (1988) 123–9, and the bibliography there cited]; or ritual [R. Buxton, "Le Voile et le silence dans *Alceste*," *CGITA* 3 (1987) 167–78; or *xenia* [G.R. Stanton, "*Philia* and *Xenia* in Euripides' 'Alkestis'," *Hermes* 118 (1990) 42–54]; or the divine mechanism of the play [R. Kilpatrick, "When a God Contrives. Divine Providence in *Alcestis* and *Ajax*," *Dionysius* 10 (1986) 2–20]. Recent readings that have been particularly helpful to me in tracing death as a crucial theme include R. Nielson, "Alcestis: A Paradox in Dying," *Ramus* 5 (1976) 92–102; R.G.A. Buxton, "Euripides' *Alkestis*: Five Aspects of an Interpretation," in *Papers given at a Colloquium on Greek Drama in Honour of R.P. Winnington-Ingram*, ed. L. Rodey (London

In this play of confusion between life and death, mortal and immortal, youth and old age,[89] and hospitality and mourning, one constant remains clear: the bravery of Alcestis, and the praise she deserves for being the best wife of all because she has consented to die for her husband. This constant exists for every character and affects them all, yet each character has his or her own perception of the impending death. On the immortal side, Apollo and Death debate the event, and though Apollo tries to guard her (34–5), Death refuses to be dissuaded, for his orders are to kill whom he must (49). He withdraws into the house "to dedicate her with my sword" (73–4). Death, naturally, sees all deaths as "death-spirits' privileges" (31), and enters the house to carry out his role as murderer-sacrificer.

Pheres praises Alcestis because she is "both good and modest in her ways" (616), and recognizes her act of self-sacrifice (620). However, after he is verbally attacked by Admetus, he considers the death, practically speaking, an act of murder, if not in fact.[90] Pheres accuses Admetus of shamelessly escaping death (694), and of surviving by killing her (696). He goes so far as to suggest that Admetus will have a string of wives, each one sacrificing herself so that he may continue living (700–1; 721). Finally, Pheres in disgust says that Admetus murdered her (730) and will suffer the consequences for it.

Admetus responds to the death of his wife primarily in terms of the deprivation it causes him. He begs Alcestis not to leave him (250), and pities himself (258, 266–7, 273, 380, 386, 391). He hyperbolically resists reintegration after the death separation by vowing to go into perpetual mourning, promising to forbid *xenia* in the house, refusing the consolation of another woman (336ff).

Alcestis' dying and death elicits sympathetic admiration from all witnesses, but at the same time it rouses feelings of betrayal and invokes accusations. The chorus enters confused about Alcestis' status: is she alive or dead (80–1)? Though it is the appointed day of her death (105), the house is too quiet and mourning has not commenced. For "how could Admetus have buried his wife with none

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1987) 17–31; R. Garner, "Death and Victory in Euripides' *Alcestis*," *Classical Antiquity* 7 (1988) 58–71; and Gregory, (above, note 78) 19–49.

[89] Gregory (above, note 78), while acknowledging her debt to Girard, explores in detail the "loss of distinctions" in the play, and much of my reading of the play takes its departure from hers.

[90] For a discussion of the Admetus/Pheres debate, see E.M. Thury, "Euripides' *Alcestis* and the Athenian Generation Gap," *Arethusa* 21 (1988) 197–216, and her bibliography.

by, and she so splendid" (96–7)? The tone is unmistakable. Alcestis, splendid and noble, deserves better treatment in death from Admetus. The chorus seems to assume that Admetus has been remiss. Furthermore, the chorus feels that Alcestis' death should be incentive enough for Admetus to kill himself in the heavenly noose (*brochōi ouraniōi* 299–300). Self-hanging carries some opporbrium,[91] and the chorus' remark, poetic though it be, reveals a grain of disapproval toward Admetus.

Alcestis' maid continues the confusion. She tells the chorus that Alcestis is both alive and dead (141), and agrees that Alcestis is the noblest wife in the eyes of all the city (152–4). She also seems to imply that Admetus has chosen a heavier burden than death, because "in this escape he will keep the pain. It will not ever go away" (197–8). Several bits of advice are offered to Admetus, and this advice is sometimes conflicting. The chorus, upon Alcestis' departure, bids Admetus to stand up to misfortune. Many men have lost good wives, because "death is an obligation claimed from all" (416–9). After Alcestis is buried, the chorus reminds Admetus again that "death has parted many from their wives" (931–3). Pheres also tells Admetus that he must endure it, difficult though it may be (*pherein anagkē* 616–7). Yet, the chorus' reaction before the death caused it to suggest that a man could reasonably commit suicide under such misfortunes, by cutting his throat or by hanging himself (228–9), and Admetus himself wants to die with Alcestis (382). After Heracles arrives, Admetus is in such anguish that he wonders how he can die (864), and berates the chorus for stopping him from throwing himself into the grave to die with Alcestis (897ff). Their children also feel betrayed, and their son focuses on the effect of his mother's death on the survivors. "She was cruel and went away and left me to live all alone" (396–7). Finally, he concludes, with Alcestis gone, the whole house is ruined (414–5).

Alcestis' own reactions to her impending death are understandably full of sadness and regret. We first hear about Alcestis' actions on the day of her death from the maid. Alcestis bathed and dressed in her finery and prayed for her children. She prays and adorns the altars while making no outcry, nor did her appearance change. When she reached her bedroom, however, she broke down and cried, and though she did not curse the bed, she blamed it for her death. Her

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[91] Van Hooff (above, note 1) 64ff.

calmness turns to near hysteria as she says goodbye to her children. She is carried onto stage in a state of death-ecstasy, but this ecstasy gives way to rationality.[92] During the "reasoned" section of her death-scene she serves up a healthy portion of guilt to Admetus. She dies, though she does not have to, for him (283). She could have married any one (284). She had so much to live for (288). Having burdened Admetus with these guilt-laden feelings, she then proceeds to ask him never to take a new bride (304ff).

The play obscures how Alcestis does in fact die. The maid and the chorus refer to her as "fading away in sickness" (*nosō merainetai* 203, 236). Murder has also been suggested or implied, by Death at the beginning of the play and by Pheres. But, though no one explicitly says that Alcestis commits suicide, several clues exist in the text to induce us to consider the possibility. Apollo explains to us that Alcestis is in the house "at the breaking point of life" (*psychorrageō* 20) and "taking leave of life" (*metastēnai biou* 21). Both phrases have an active sense; the former means "letting the soul break loose," and the latter "withdrawing" or "removing oneself." The description of her actions in the house before she dies reminds us of Deianeira in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, and both women die because of their husbands. Alcestis' first appearance on stage reminds us of Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. The parallels are unmistakable, both in dramaturgy and in nuance. Just as the maid here refers to Alcestis as fading with sickness (*nosō*) so too does the nurse in the *Hippolytus* refer to the sickness of Phaedra (176). As Apollo here refers to Alcestis as "removing herself" from life, so too does the nurse refer to Phaedra's "removing herself" from life (*apostasin biou* 277). The veiling and silence of Alcestis when she returns from the underworld also is reminiscent of Phaedra's veiling and silence in the *Hippolytus* (275).[93] Alcestis' accusations against Admetus' parents for not themselves dying for Admetus at 293ff recall Antigone's reasons for the sacrifice of herself for her brother's burial at 905ff.[94] In a gender

[92] This scene is notorious because of the switch from emotion to reason, but as A.M. Dale, ed. *Alcestis* (Oxford 1954) ad loc. says "a death-scene treated under this dual aspect forces itself strangely on our notice" (74). Gregory (above, note 78) 32, suggests that the dual aspects reinforce the play's thematic motifs: "by juxtaposing a lyric evocation of terrified delirium with an analytical account of freely chosen sacrifice, Euripides is once again drawing attention to the confusion of categories that follows upon Apollo's bargain with the Fates."

[93] Buxton, "Five aspects..." (above, note 75) 22.

[94] Pointed out by Dale, ad loc.

reversal, Admetus' pleas to Alcestis recall Tecmessa's appeals to Ajax in Sophocles' play.[95] During her death scene, Alcestis begs Admetus to let her lie down, for she has no strength in her legs (266–7). In Plato's *Phaedo* 117b after Socrates drinks the hemlock, he is advised not to do anything until his legs become heavy, and in 117e we are told that he walked around until his legs became heavy. The description of how poison works from the bottom up seems to apply here in the *Alcestis*. Despite what Alcestis' intentions were, she has chosen death, just as emphatically as Antigone, Menoeceus, Deianeira, Phaedra, Ajax and Socrates. Euripides, I believe, has deliberately obscured the issue of the type of death she suffers, but has planted enough clues for us to consider suicide a real possibility.

However, Alcestis does not in fact remain dead. The motif of resurrection plays an important part in the play. Apollo (65ff) first introduces it when he tells Death that Heracles will wrestle him for Alcestis and win. Admetus, during the death-scene, regrets that he is not musical like Orpheus, because he would have won Alcestis back from death and gone beneath the earth to rescue her (357ff). The chorus, upon Alcestis' death, echoes Admetus' desire and wishes for the strength to bring Alcestis back to the light of day (455ff). These indications of the possibility of rescue prepare us for the role of Heracles, who enters hard upon the chorus' wish to rescue Alcestis. Through him Euripides explores Alcestis' aristocratic and reactionary ideals, particularly *xenia*, piety and loyalty. Though overwhelmed by grief, Admetus subordinates the basic, private husband-wife relationship to the more public one of friendship among equals.

As in the other self-sacrifice plays, once again the act has proven to be problematical. For what purpose did Alcestis die, and even more importantly, why is she rescued?[96] She gave her life to save her husband and to reward his aristocratic ideals. When she returns, a reevaluation of those ideals becomes necessary, because in the end the life of a dutiful and noble woman is more sympathetically received than her death. The ethical ideals that Admetus espoused fare well in this reevaluation and receive a new life of their own.

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95 Pointed out by Gregory (above, note 78) 33.

96 There are, of course, various answers to this question, but Gregory (above, note 78) 43ff, argues that the return means that Admetus and Alcestis can live out their lives happily because, like other mortals, they won't know the circumstances of their own deaths.

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The self-sacrifice plays invoke intricate reactions. Pheres, in the *Alcestis*, raises the crucial objection to the whole idea of self-sacrifice: I am not obliged to die for you (682). When, if ever, someone is obliged to die for another is a question that Euripides returns to repeatedly. The concept of "Euripides the patriot" has made itself felt in Euripidean criticism of the "self-sacrifice" plays. Even scholars wishing to break away from the way of reading his plays that finds particular and specific links to contemporary figures or events, nonetheless acknowledge that the "dramatist who was so keenly aware of life around him cannot but betray his feelings as a man and a citizen; of these it is his patriotism that brings Euripides into direct contact with the contemporary political scene."[97] Euripides is said to "glorify Athens" in the *Children of Heracles*,[98] and the play is said to emphasize the "piety of Athens in her response to supplication and, more particularly, the tendency of Athens to defend a weaker state against a stronger one in what she believes to be a just cause."[99] And we have already seen how scholars have embraced the scenes of self-sacrifice as scenes of pure and noble intention only, by that indicating Euripides' own respect for such altruism displayed for the benefit of one's city. The *Hecuba* and the *Alcestis* complicate this picture, because the victims nobly sacrifice themselves for a smaller rather than a greater good. While Menoeceus, Macaria and Iphigenia become martyrs to save their cities, Polyxena and Alcestis sacrifice themselves to uphold the aristocratic ideals of nobility and good reputation, and in the latter case nobility, reputation and *xenia*. Polyxena and Alcestis resemble the Sophoclean Antigone, who also becomes a martyr to uphold aristocratic and traditional ideals.

However, Euripides' dramatic purpose, if not his personal convictions, complicates the idea of self-sacrifice even further in several ways: Menoeceus commits suicide and so befuddles the sacrifice; Macaria offers to die for personal and private reasons, by that detracting from the concept of pure altruistic self-sacrifice; Iphigenia acts rashly for an unworthy cause, and the heroic ideal becomes pathetic; Polyxena's death accomplishes no greater good for either the Trojans or the

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[97] Grube (above, note 1) 37.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Conacher, *ED* (above, note 73) 109.

Greeks, for the winds continue becalmed for the duration of Hecuba's revenge and prosecution.[100] Ironically, the most moving and uplifting scene belongs to the Trojan Polyxena, who sacrifices herself solely to maintain her nobility. And Alcestis doesn't die at all, but returns to life, apparently rewarded for her unselfish devotion to her husband and traditional male ideals.

[100] As Gregory (above, note 78) 98 and n. 26, points out, "When it came to religious ritual, the Greeks expected results commensurate to the effort involved."

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: SUICIDE IN EURIPIDES' *HELEN*

To die is best. How could I die well?
Helen 298

Euripides' *Helen* presents in microcosm the range of possibilities for the suicide motif in Greek tragedy. Tragic suicide includes actual self-destruction, suicide threatened but not carried out, coercive suicide used to gain some ends that would be otherwise unattainable and suicide as a possible explanation for deaths not clearly attributable to other causes. Tragic characters commit suicide because they have been disgraced and must restore their honor, because they have suffered an unbearable loss and cannot endure the grief, because they seek to avoid future suffering, or because they sacrifice themselves for a greater good. The *Helen* is a microcosm of the range of possibilities for the suicide motif in Greek tragedy, and the ironic tone of the entire play permits us to step back from the heart wrenching phenomenon for final reflections on the theatricality and ethics of self-destruction.[1]

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[1] Bibliography on the *Helen* includes: H. Steiger, "Wie Entstand die *Helena* des Euripides," *Philologus* 67 (1908) 202–8; F. Solmsen, "*Onoma* and *Pragma* in Euripides' *Helen*," *CR* 48 (1934) 110–21; G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941; reprint 1961); W. Strohm, *Euripides: Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form*, *Zetemata* 15 (Munich 1957); R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (Baltimore 1958) 122–5; A.N. Pippin, "Euripides' *Helen*: A Comedy of Ideas," *CP* 55 (1960) 151–63; G. Zuntz, "On Euripides' *Helen*: Theology and Irony," *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* VI (Geneva 1960) 199–241; K. Alt, "Zur Anagnorisis in der *Helena*," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 6–24; D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama. Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967); C. Wolff, "On Euripides' *Helen*," *HSCP* 77 (1973) 61–84; G. Dimcock, "God, or Not God, or Between the Two?—Euripides' *Helen*," Katharine Asher Engel Lectures, Smith College, 1976; D. Sansone, "Theonoe and Theoclymenus," *Symbolae Osloenses* LX (1985) 17–36; K.H. Lee, "Helen's Famous Husband," *CP* 81 (1986) 309–13; C.P. Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy. Myth, Poetry, Text* (Cornell 1986); D.G. Papi, "Victors and Sufferers in Euripides' *Helen*," *AJPh* 108 (1987) 27–40; J.S. Zembaty, "Plato's *Republic* and Greek Morality on Lying," *JHPh* 26 (1988) 517–45; C.W. Willink, "The Parodos of Euripides' *Helen* (164–90)," *CQ* 40 (1990) 77–99.

Editions and commentaries: G. Murray, ed., *Euripidis Fabulae* vol. 3 (Oxford 1909); H. Gregoire, ed., *Euripide*, Bude ed., vol. 5 (Paris 1923); A.Y. Campbell, *Euripides' Helena* (Liverpool 1950); A.M. Dale, *Euripides' Helen* (Oxford 1967); R. Kannicht, *Euripides, Helena* (Heidelberg 1969).

Since the interpretations of Solmsen and Pippin,[2] the appearance and reality dichotomy in the *Helen* has been central to any reading of the play. This dichotomy finds poignant underpinnings in the way in which Euripides uses the suicide motif to highlight the paradox. That is to say, the eidolon, the image of Helen that went to Troy in place of the real Helen, inspires men and women to acts of valor based on a set of accepted social standards that includes honorable suicide, while the real Helen, though she and her husband contemplate suicide and use coercive suicide threats, inspires men and women to acts of *deceit*.[3] Furthermore, although the *real* Helen and Menelaus may suggest suicide for themselves, in fact they escape their predicament by less honorable means, and demonstrate that survival displaces the need for good repute.[4]

By the end of the prologue of the *Helen*, Teucer, Helen's first interlocutor, has recounted four suicides, one of which is well known in Greek literature (Ajax), three of which (Leda, Castor and Polydeuces) Euripides apparently invented. However, all of these suicides ultimately occur because of the eidolon "Helen," who has taken the place in Troy of the real Helen who has been all this time in Egypt. Several questions arise concerning the opening dialogue of the play between the real Helen and Teucer, and its relationship to the rest of the play. The essential question of why Teucer is the bringer of the news has been addressed before, though not exhaustively.[5] A second closely related question has not been previously asked; namely, why does Euripides emphasize suicide so dramatically in the content of Teucer's dialogue? Clearly, the burden of guilt on Helen increases,[6] and the unfairness of her situation becomes even more pronounced. However, these suicides are reiterated throughout the play and create not only significant dramaturgic links between the prologue and the rest of the drama, but also lay the ground for the death and rebirth theme that informs the play as a whole.[7]

According to this play, Helen never experienced the heroic world

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[2] Above, note 1.

[3] K.V. Hartigan, "Salvation via Deceit. A New Look at *Iphigenia at Tauris*," *Eranos* 84 (1986) 119–25, discusses how salvation may come from what in real life ought to be condemned. Here rescue occurs through using almost flippantly something that in real Heroic life is honorable, acceptable and serious.

[4] See Dimcock (above, note 1) 17.

[5] E.g., Strohm (above, note 1); Conacher (above, note 1); Kannicht (above, note 1).

[6] See Dale (above, note 1) ad loc.

[7] See Segal (above, note 1).

of the Trojan war, but instead spent her time completely detached from it in the exotic environment of Egypt.[8] Egypt represented to the Greeks "otherness," a place where the earth deity is male and the sky deity female, a place where property passes through the female, a place, in other words, the opposite of Greece. Just as Egypt knows nothing of heroic values or competitive ethics, so too Helen. When Teucer arrives and begins to relate to her the events of the Trojan war, Helen leaps to inappropriate conclusions. Teucer initiates the suicide motif in line 94 when he begins to relate the calamity that befell his brother Ajax. Teucer as Ajax's brother and guardian has a special connection with the nobility of suicide and hardship caused by the counterfeit Helen. He, therefore, appropriately introduces the specific and paradoxical problem of noble suicides committed because of an eidolon. Given Ajax's feeling of rejection from his society, he was left with no choice but to end his life and thereby retain his pride. However, Ajax's suicide not only deprived Teucer of his brother, but created subsequent hardship for the survivor because he had the unenviable role of bearing the news to his father. Telamon finds fault with Teucer for surviving, and exiles him. Suicides permeate the *Helen*, but the first one mentioned is typically presented in Greek literature as understandable and ennobling. The mere mention of Ajax's name (94) calls to mind his stubborn yet admirable adherence to his and his society's standards. Helen's reaction, "Was he mad? Would any sensible man dare such a thing?" demonstrates her isolation from the heroic world where the burden of shame affords an acceptable reason for suicide.[9] In the fairy tale land of Egypt, one *would* have to be mad to kill oneself, but in the heroic world, madness has little to do with it. Although Teucer does not specifically respond to Helen's question, he seems to try to inform her of heroic values by explaining to her the gravity of the Judgement of Arms. The true irony lies in the fact that Ajax's noble suicide resulted from an action (the granting of the arms to Odysseus) which ultimately occurred because of a war fought on behalf of a counterfeit. Teucer is unaware of, and the real Helen misses,

[8] See Segal (above, note 1) 229, and n. 25, for a discussion of Egypt as a never-never land.

[9] Dimcock (above, note 1) 19, goes even further and suggests that Euripides "is telling us that the Homeric view of life is finished," and that one can attain happiness through "a different kind of heroism . . . namely, a willingness to die to prevent not only themselves but also those close to them from doing wrong."

this irony, but we the audience feel the paradox acutely, both here and throughout the play. The most notable instance of tragic suicide sets the stage for subsequent suicidal musings.

Teucer then relates other suicides which took place because of the shame caused by the supposed actions of Helen. Leda, he tells us, hanged herself because of the ill-repute of her daughter (134–6). Leda's suicide seems to be Euripides' own invention (so Dale, ad loc.), but he situates it within the Greek attitude towards suicide that finds certain kinds of suicide acceptable by attributing her motivation to shame and dishonor. Her brothers, also, it is rumored, sacrificed their lives on account of their sister (142). Again, Euripides probably invented this version, but here he uses suicide to demonstrate the paradoxical nature of the whole play. Teucer responds to Helen's query about her brothers: they are dead and not dead. There are two stories (138). In other words, what information Teucer has given Helen is based on hearsay (136, 140), yet Teucer with the sting of Ajax's suicide still on his mind finds the rumors of suicide compelling enough to tell even strangers he encounters in foreign lands. In turn, Teucer's preoccupation with self-destruction sets Helen to thinking about suicide and its repercussions. In her lyric exchange with the chorus during the parodos, Helen sees herself as the catalyst to the suicides: through me the killer of many, through my name of sorrow (198–9). The central paradox of the *Helen* remains intact as Helen attributes the causes to her *name* rather than the true person.[10] However, Helen clearly grasps the distinction between her mother's certain and her brothers' possible suicides, for when she laments in lyrics the damage she has caused, she bemoans Leda's death, but her brothers' disappearance. Euripides introduces the notion here that suicide can be a possibility though not necessarily actualized, a notion that proves to be the case for Helen and Menelaus.

The motivation to all these suicides, actual or possible, was dishonor and shame. Helen internalizes this shame, and when her lyric lament gives way to a rhesis, she examines and verbalizes her own misery (255ff). She herself though not guilty is nonetheless disgraced (270), and sees no escape since she believes Menelaus is dead (279). Her guilty though guiltless part in her mother's demise (280–1) remains uppermost on her mind as she tries to give expression to the paradox. The ambiguity of Euripides' language here shows how

[10] See Solmsen (above, note 1), and Pippin (above, note 1) 153.

confusing Helen finds the paradox: unfairly, but the unfairness I must take (281). And for all intents and purposes, Helen herself, due to her disgrace, has *in fact* died, though not in actuality (285–6). Why then, she asks, should she continue to live (293) since death is best when life is bitter (297–8). Here she seems to embrace the notion of noble suicide that ends an unbearable existence.

Noble death is an important component of the escape plot later in the play. While Menelaus and Helen plot their escape, suicide occurs to them as one possibility. Helen swears that if Menelaus is killed in his attempt, then she will kill herself with the same sword (837). Menelaus commences a solemn pledge,[11] binding himself and Helen to death. Helen, still concerned with her reputation, as she has been throughout the play (e.g., 53ff, 249ff, 362ff, 927),[12] inquires how they might die and still have good reputation (841). In other words, Helen is concerned that their *noble* resolve be apparent to the world. The notion of nobility in death seems to jog Menelaus' memory with thoughts of Achilles, Ajax and Nestor, great sufferers in the Trojan War. Teucer's earlier announcement of Ajax's suicide now becomes contextually grounded. The idea of noble suicide has been present in the audience's mind since the beginning of the play, and we are perhaps only mildly surprised when Menelaus looks to a similar noble end. Of course, Ajax, Achilles and Nestor all suffered for an eidolon, whereas Menelaus' suicide, were it to take place, would be for the real Helen. But this is the paradox: for the *real* Helen nobility is not required and no suicides will happen, since as usual Helen will escape unscathed. This is no new literary topos: in *Iliad* 3, Helen disdains herself only to be forgiven by Priam and the others for whom she has caused such distress. In Gorgias' *Helen* she is proven to be an innocent victim of eros. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, despite Hecuba's salient arguments, Helen leaves unharmed with Menelaus. But the topos has been set on its head in the *Helen*, and has become in many ways more poignant because real people have suffered because of a sham. Conversely the reputation of Helen herself is in danger of being soiled by a sham. Furthermore, the real Helen will inspire acts of deceit, not only for herself and Menelaus, but also Theonoe, the representative of the gods in this play.[13]

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[11] See Dale (above, note 1) ad loc.

[12] See Pippin (above, note 1) 153, and Sansone (above, note 1) 25–8.

[13] See Zuntz (above, note 1), Dimcock (above, note 1) and Sansone (above, note 1) for good discussions of Theonoe's role. For lying, see Zembaty (above, note 1) esp. 529–32.

Noble suicide is not the only type of self-destruction contemplated in the *Helen*. In the scene between Menelaus and Theonoe Menelaus resorts to a suicide threat as a means of coercion (982–90). Though Helen in her appeal to Theonoe had dwelt on the importance of recovering her good name, Menelaus concentrates on the import of exhibiting his courage (953) through force. First he will duel with Theoclymenus, and if Theoclymenus will not face him, then he will kill Helen and himself with the double-edged sword (983). His reasons for the double death are not so that he may restore their honor, but so that their corpses might provide perpetual pain to Theonoe and blame for Proteus (986–7). Earlier at 842 in response to Helen's question of how to die with good repute, Menelaus suggested suicide on the tomb of Proteus if his struggle for her fails. Death in a sacred place inevitably causes pollution,[14] and Menelaus uses this fact to his advantage to sway Theonoe to their side. Menelaus' main interest in suicide is to use it merely as one tool of persuasion. When he thinks that this tool has failed in his plea to Theonoe, he suggests that another, less forceful ploy might have been better. However, suicidal coercion is effective, and Theonoe agrees to participate in their deceit, seeing participation as a means to preserving Proteus' and her own good names.[15] The ends have justified the means.

In addition to the ethical considerations of suicide Euripides examines the actual act in the *Helen*. Helen is voyeuristically curious about how one goes about it. Teucer in the prologue mentioned two ways: hanging and stabbing. Helen, after she determines that death is best (298), begins to think more concretely about the act. Hanging is ugly and is considered unseemly even among slaves. Death by the knife, however, is noble and good, and death occurs quickly (299–302). There is not universal agreement that these verses are an interpolation, though the two recent commentaries of Dale and Kannicht support the interpolation theory. The major objections of Dale and Kannicht to lines 299–302 rest more on the *sentiment* of the lines than on the grammar and language. Dale finds it "shockingly out of place" for Helen to worry about the disfigurement of suicide by hanging when she has only just heard about Leda's death by hanging. Kannicht[16] feels the whole speech makes more sense without

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[14] See R. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) passim.

[15] See Sansone (above, note 1) 27–8.

[16] For bibliography on the question see Kannicht (above, note 1) ad loc.

299–302, i.e. Helen's problem is not one of the proper or improper ways of suicide, but of the basic necessity of suicide.[17] However, with the simple acceptance of the emendation suggested by Stephanus of changing *ou* in l. 298 to *oun* Helen's question does become one of the proper way to kill herself. While excising the lines (299–302) *may* give Helen a more cohesive train of thought, retaining the lines actually accords with the paradoxical nature of the whole play, and of Helen herself. Suicide, she has decided, is a good thing, yet to perform the act entails disfigurement. Suicide is a complicated issue. While one may pity someone else for the act, it is quite another thing to imagine oneself in the same situation, especially a figure like Helen who objectifies her beauty to such an extent that she cannot bear to spoil it.[18] Suicide itself is a paradox. The motivation, e.g., desire for good reputation, may be honorable, but the act itself is brutal and frightening. Helen clearly shrinks from the act as she demonstrates here and in her lyric return to the question at 351ff.[19]

Before Helen retires to the house to question Theonoe about the fate of Menelaus, in lyric dialogue with the chorus she reiterates her resolve to die if Menelaus is dead (351–2). She sees two possible ways:[20] a "bloody hanging" or "gushing sword thrust" (352–6). She again imagines the horror of the act as opposed to the nobility of the conception, but the second alternative of throat-streaming slaughter suggests to her the sacrificial victim, a role she seems prepared to accept. As she did in iambics at ll. 299–302, she again rejects a hanging death for a bloody sacrificial one. This kind of "suttee" reflects the self-sacrifice aspect of suicide in several Euripidean dramas, and one is reminded especially of Evadne in the *Suppliant Women.* Euripides has paved the way for suttee by suggesting it at 279, and will return to the notion in 837 after Helen's reunion with Menelaus.

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[17] N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass. 1987) 13–17, discusses the gender distinction between hanging and stabbing, and concludes that women have a choice of the feminine "hanging" or the masculine "stabbing," and this shows that for women "there is liberty in tragedy—liberty in death."

[18] So Grube (above, note 1) 238, who retains the lines.

[19] The other objections of Kannicht and Dale seem to proceed from what they think Helen ought to be saying instead of what she is saying. In the context of suicide in Greek tragedy, it is not unusual for suicidal victims to imagine the actual act. Clearly l. 298 is extremely inelegant Greek unless one makes the change suggested by Stephanus.

[20] See Dale (above, note 1) ad loc., for the slight possibility of a third way.

Suicide is one of the motifs Euripides uses to show the flux of the play from death to life and from hope to despair.[21] After Helen and Menelaus finally have recognized each other, Helen eagerly embraces life, and Menelaus notes the paradox of their reunion: but evil (*kakon*) turned to good brought you and me together again, spouse for a long time. Nevertheless, may we meet with good luck (644–5). The suicide motif, however, almost inevitably recurs as husband and wife begin to exchange information concerning events which occurred during their long separation. Helen reiterates Leda's suicide, its manner, hanging, and her motivation for it, disgrace at Helen's actions (686–7). Leda's suicide has little immediate effect on Menelaus, although soon he will appeal to Ajax's suicide as a paradigm for his own actions (845ff). When finally husband and wife embark on their plan for escape, it does not in fact entail suicide, despite the repeated suggestions throughout the play that it might. It does however include the feigned death of Menelaus. His first reaction is uneasiness (1051), but he quickly looks to the gain to be made by it, and so agrees. Helen, of course, has all the answers to Menelaus' many misgivings, and concludes the scene by realizing that if Theoclymenus discovers the deception, she must die (1091–2).

Her deception is not discovered. In fact, it is so convincing that Theoclymenus fears that she may kill herself in grief (1395–8), and her efficient and effective "role-playing" nearly costs them their opportunity to escape. But because of her facility in argumentation, she and Menelaus secure the means of escape, and the chorus wishes them safe journeying, calling on the Dioscuri to cleanse Helen's name. In the world of heroic ethics honorable suicide is surely more acceptable than deceitful escape. Yet in this world of confusion between real and apparent, deceitful escape in the nick of time sets Helen and Menelaus on their way to a renewed life in Sparta.

The entry of the Dioscuri is abrupt, like every *deus ex machina*, yet it has been anticipated in earlier scenes by the mention of them by other characters. Teucer presented at the beginning of the play the Dioscuri and their demise because of Helen. Appropriately, they appear at the end to exonerate Helen as the chorus has asked. Theoclymenus agrees and in fact holds Helen up as a paradigm for other women (1686–7). The circle is complete. Helen, for so long

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[21] So Segal and Conacher (above, note 1), respectively.

unfairly held in contempt by the Greek and Trojan world though suspended in a fairyland, proves to be not the self-centered catalyst to the Trojan war, but the epitome of the chaste wife, challenging even Penelope in faithfulness and wiles.

Euripides has used the motif of suicide in all of its facets to induce us to explore the nature and relevance of heroic ethics, the pain that life entails, the problems of reality vs. appearance and truth vs. deceit. In the end, though the *Helen* ends "happily," the message seems to be that life is serious business, where things are not what they seem, and any act, even suicide, can be manipulated to complicate further and blur the distinctions between real and apparent.

Incidental Suicide

In addition to the suicides we have discussed in this book, several other variations occur in extant Greek tragedy. The motif of coercion, developed most fully in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens*, is also used by Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, Philoctetes in his name play and Orestes in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*. Clytemnestra at 874–6 claims to have dreamed of suicide because of Agamemnon's long absence. She, in an effort to persuade Agamemnon to take the deadly path of the purple carpet, tells of her dreams of a hanging suicide. She manipulates and coerces Agamemnon by playing on his sympathy. Philoctetes threatens to hurl himself from a cliff (999ff) to avoid returning to Troy with the hateful Odysseus, and later (1203ff) asks the chorus for a sword or an ax so that he can join his father in the house of Hades. He uses the threats not only to express his despair and unbearable suffering,[22] but also to compel the others to take his side against Odysseus. In Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Orestes (972ff) threatens Apollo himself with his starvation if the god refuses to rescue him from further pursuit by the Furies. Other tragic characters threaten to die by starvation, like Iphis in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (1105ff) after he witnesses his daughter's self-destroying leap. Euripides' Orestes in the beginning of his name play refuses food in agony at his murder of his mother (189). Earlier, Electra tells Helen that Orestes "killed himself when he killed her" (91), a metaphor

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[22] A.J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (Routledge 1990) 123ff, discusses suicide because of *inpatentia*.

that refers to his mental state after the horrendous act. Sophocles' Electra (835ff) finds the chorus' hope in the face of her own despair and wasting away brutal and unwelcome. She, though living, is dead because Orestes and Agamemnon are dead (1151–2). When she discovers that Orestes in fact lives, she commissions him to take up her revenge, through which she would have accomplished "a good deliverance or a good death" for herself (1320f). Euripides' Electra also threatens to stab herself with a sword if Orestes dies in his struggle (686–8). Creusa in the *Ion*, like Electra, will kill herself by sword or hanging if the murder she is planning fails, for the chorus sings, "she, born of a noble line, would never endure to see foreigners ruling the house, not while living her eyes still see clearly" (1069–73).

Sometimes, as in the *Hecuba*, suicide is deemed the proper reaction to a set of circumstances. For example, in the *Orestes*, Orestes can escape stoning by the people of Argos only if he promises that he and Electra will kill themselves (946ff). This is an ironic punishment, for earlier (577ff) Orestes had chided Clytemnestra because she did not "do the proper thing and put herself to death" when she was discovered in adultery. Hecuba extends the same recrimination to Helen in the *Trojan Women* 1012–4: "But when were you ever caught in the strangling noose, caught sharpening a dagger? Which any noble wife would do, desperate with longing for her lord's return." The most common means of suicide are the sword, hanging, or starvation, but leaping onto a pyre is also a possibility, as we saw in the case of Evadne in Euripides' *Suppliant Women.* Hecuba in the *Trojan Women* 1282 in despair tries to convince the captive women to kill themselves in the flames. On occasion people other than the victims mistakenly assume that the victims are contemplating suicide. In *Oedipus the King* when Jocasta leaves the stage and is followed by Oedipus, the chorus assumes that it is Oedipus who will kill himself and they sing a dirge for him instead of Jocasta. In the *Orestes* when Orestes is explaining to Menelaus his distraught state of mind and suggests that only one recourse remains, Menelaus immediately thinks that he means suicide (414–5), although he considers the option "unwise." Orestes, however, meant seeking help from Apollo (416). And in the *Trojan Women* Talthybius, when he sees flames from within the Trojan women's chambers, assumes that they have set themselves "aflame in longing for death" (301–2). Hecuba corrects him: there is no fire; only Cassandra with a flaming torch (306–7). Finally, the motif of self-sacrifice can be suggested but not carried out. In the *Iphigenia*

among the Taurians, Iphigenia tells Orestes she would voluntarily and gladly die to ensure his safety. For, she says, "if a man die, a house, a name, is lost. But if a woman die, what does it matter?" (1005–7).

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Death, the separation of one from life, the distinguishing characteristic of humans, permeates Greek tragedy, and one type of death, suicide, seems to have fascinated the playwrights and, we may assume, their audiences. Ordinary death, whether by murder or natural causes, is irreversible, inevitable, and unpredictable, but in the case of suicide death becomes predictable and under the victim's control. Suicide is a paradoxical kind of death, for though death remains irreversible, its timing has been determined and manipulated by the victim. Though one has no control *in* death, suicide gives one control *over* death and hence the repercussions of suicide can be diverse and sometimes ironic. Suicide can be used to punish, release, coerce, end curses and pollution or create curses and pollution, save communities or destroy them, save face or lose face, and so on.

The ethical considerations behind the tragic victims' decision to kill themselves cover a wide gambit. The concept of *philia*, important through Greek culture and Greek tragedy, shows the importance of society in the deliberations and decisions of the suicides. *Philia*, the blanket term for relationships in society, gives rise to a number of crucial ethical stances. Most pervasively is the idea of *eukleia*, good repute, that depends on *aretē* and *eugeneia*, excellence and good birth. Aristocratic ideals, to be sure, and it is no wonder that during the tumultuous period of emerging democracy, the playwrights returned again and again to these notions, still commendable but becoming more and more outdated and irrelevant. Vengeance, a motivation that exists in most human cultures, becomes contained and subsumed in the state, and tragic characters who commit suicide have often directed inward their desire for external vengeance. *Aidōs*, a sense of shame, clearly saturates Greek ethics from Homer to Aristotle and beyond, and much has been written about the change from a shame culture to a guilt culture. Euripides, as we have seen, expands the traditional meaning of a sense of shame before others to include the notion of an internal, personal guilt. *Aidōs* drives many victims to kill themselves. Grief and despair also induce suicide, though other

considerations, seemingly contradictory to the usual associations of shame and good repute and the grief and despair associated with their loss, provide an interesting corrective. Endurance in the face of disaster and the courage to live are concepts perhaps more familiar to a twentieth-century audience, but these notions, as we have seen, informed the ancient playwrights as well.

Suicide does not take place in isolation; rather it results directly from one's place, real or perceived, in society. An individual can overintegrate or underintegrate the ethical rules that society creates and enforces, and become, as it were, individual enforcers to ensure the continuance of society. Societies are complex entities; there is very little black and white, and individuals can easily misinterpret and misuse its rules. When a realization of error occurs, suicide happens. The error can be society's or the individual's, but in either event, suicide often corrects it. The tragedians use the suicide motif in almost every conceivable way to portray the complicated and painful nature of human existence.

APPENDIX B

PLOT SUMMARIES

The following is an alphabetical list of plot summaries of the Greek plays that have received sustained discussions. The plays are readily accessible in English in the *Greek Tragedies* series published by University of Chicago Press.

Ajax (Sophocles, mid 5th c.)

Ajax, the greatest Greek hero in the Trojan War to survive Achilles, fails to receive due recognition when Achilles' arms are awarded to Odysseus. He plots vengeance against the Greek leaders, but in a fit of madness caused by Athena mistakenly slaughters cattle. When he regains his sanity, his shame and anger are so great that, despite attempts by loyal friends to dissuade him, he commits suicide using Hector's, the Trojan warrior, sword. His half-brother, Teucer, and the Greek leaders debate his disposal, but Odysseus humanely intervenes and Ajax receives due burial.

Alcestis (Euripides, 438)

Apollo, in gratitude to Admetus for the hospitality he had received while serving his penance in recompense to Zeus for the murder of the Cyclopes, cheated the Fates of Admetus' death by providing a substitute for him. Pheres, Admetus' aged father, and his mother refuse, but Alcestis, his wife, agrees. At the point of death, Alcestis extracts a promise of celibacy from Admetus. Heracles arrives and though Admetus' house is in mourning, he is nevertheless entertained since Admetus places great emphasis on hospitality. Heracles eventually learns what has happened, fights death and brings Alcestis back to life and Admetus and Alcestis are reunited in marriage.

Andromache (Euripides, mid 420s?)

Andromache, widow of Hector and concubine of Neoptolemus, takes refuge at the altar of Thetis from Hermione, wife of Neoptolemus,

who wishes to kill Andromache and her son. Hermione, frightened and spiteful, blames Andromache for her recent marital problems and her barrenness; she and Menelaus, her father, are on the verge of murdering the two when Peleus, Achilles' father, arrives in the nick of time. When Menelaus withdraws his support of Hermione, she attempts to kill herself, but Orestes offers a different means of escape: marriage to him after he has Neoptolemus killed at Delphi. Thetis, as dea ex machina, rescues Peleus from his despair, and Andromache and her son go to Molossia where she marries Helenus.

Antigone (Sophocles, mid 5th c.)

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus and sister of Polyneices and Eteocles, defies her uncle Creon's order and buries Polyneices who had attacked Thebes in an effort to regain the throne. After her act is discovered, Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's betrothed, attempts in vain to convince Creon to relent from his order that Antigone be buried alive. Teiresias, the seer, prophesies doom and Creon relents, though too late. At the cave at the side of Antigone who has hanged herself, Haemon unsuccessfully attacks Creon with his knife and then stabs himself. After a messenger relates these events to Eurydice, Creon's wife, she stabs herself while cursing Creon.

Children of Heracles (Euripides, 429?)

The aged Iolaus, a friend of Heracles, fleeing the wrath of Eurystheus, king of Argos, arrives at Marathon with the children of Heracles to seek sanctuary with Demophon, king of Athens. Demophon, impressed by their aristocratic notions of death before dishonor, agrees to protect them but finds himself on the brink of war with Argos and in disfavor with his own people. An oracle has demanded that a young female be given as a victim to Persephone, and Macaria, one of the children of Heracles, volunteers to die. A messenger of Hyllus, the grandson of Alcmene and son of Heracles, announces that Hyllus has brought reinforcements for Demophon. Upon victory, Demophon sends Eurystheus in chains to Marathon, and after a lengthy and vituperous debate with Alcmene, Eurystheus is removed for destruction.

Hecuba (Euripides, 425–424?)

Hecuba, widow of Priam and bereft of all her children except (she thinks) the youngest, Polydorus and Polyxena, begs Odysseus to prevent Polyxena's sacrifice on Achilles' tomb. Polyxena prefers to die with nobility, and voluntarily dies with grace and beauty. As Hecuba performs final bathing rites for the dead Polyxena, the body of Polydorus is washed ashore, changing Hecuba from a downtrodden victim into a complete, bloodthirsty revenge-seeker. She plans revenge for her former guest-friend, Polymestor, to whom she had entrusted her youngest son for safe-keeping during the Trojan war but who had betrayed that trust. She blinds him and murders his children. Agamemnon hears both sides of the case from Hecuba and Polymestor, and rules in favor of Hecuba.

Helen (Euripides, 411?)

Helen was not after all taken to Troy by Paris, but instead an image of her was taken while the real Helen went to Egypt. Here she awaits rescue by Menelaus. Teucer, the brother of Ajax, arrives and finds Helen taking refuge from the Egyptian king at the altar. Teucer tells Helen that her brothers and mother are dead, all perhaps by suicide. When Menelaus, in rags, arrives, he and Helen devise a plan for escape. By enlisting the aid of Theonoe, the king's sister, Helen and Menelaus escape. When Theoclymenus attempts to recapture them, Castor and Polydeuces, Helen's deified brothers, come to her rescue, and Helen and Menelaus return safely to Sparta.

Heracles (Euripides, 4th quarter of the 5th c.)

Amphitryon, Heracles' mortal father, and Megara, Heracles' wife, come as suppliants to Lycus, usurper of the throne of Thebes. While the suppliants prepare themselves for noble death, Heracles returning from the underworld arrives opportunely to save them. Madness, however, overtakes him and instead of saving his family, he kills wife and children. Upon recovering his sanity, Heracles hears of the murders from Amphitryon and then prepares himself for suicide. Theseus arrives and prevails upon Heracles to live.

Hippolytus (Euripides, 428)

Hippolytus, the son of Theseus and an Amazon queen, is exclusively an ardent worshipper of Artemis. An offended Aphrodite determines to take vengeance on him through Phaedra, the wife of Theseus. Phaedra, a victim of eros, tries to kill herself in an effort to keep her desire a secret. Her nurse extracts the information and relates it to Hippolytus who curses Phaedra who is secretly listening. Fearing for her reputation, Phaedra writes a suicide note condemning Hippolytus for raping her and hangs herself. Theseus believes her note and in sadness and anger calls down Poseidon's curse on Hippolytus, who is trampled by his own horses. Artemis reveals Aphrodite's hand in the events, and Theseus and Hippolytus reconcile as Hippolytus dies.

Iphigenia at Aulis (Euripides, 407–6)

Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Greek army assembled at Aulis, is informed by Calchas, the prophet, that he must sacrifice his own daughter Iphigenia before Artemis will allow the winds to carry them to Troy. Under pretext of marriage to Achilles, Agamemnon summons Iphigenia to Aulis. When she arrives with her mother, Clytemnestra, the truth is revealed and Achilles vows to protect the frightened and unwilling Iphigenia. Suddenly, however, Iphigenia has a change of heart, and willingly consents to be sacrificed in order to save her country.

Oedipus the King (Sophocles, 430s)

Oedipus, a pious and fatherly king of Thebes, seeks to relieve the city's pollution by ascertaining the murderer of the former king, Laius. The steps in the investigation lead him to accuse falsely Creon, his wife Jocasta's brother, of conspiracy with Teiresias, the seer. Jocasta, Laius' former wife, attempts to allay Oedipus' growing doubts and fears by proving the oracles false, but when Oedipus' true identity comes to light, she hangs herself in grief. Oedipus then blinds himself and goes into exile.

The Phoenician Women (Euripides, 411–409)

Polyneices, the son of Oedipus and Jocasta and brother of Eteocles, returns to Thebes to claim his throne. Though Jocasta pleads at length with her sons to find a peaceful reconciliation to their competition for the kingship, she fails to convince them. Creon, Jocasta's brother, advises Eteocles to prepare for battle. As part of the preparation, he summons the prophet Teiresias, who prophesies that Creon must kill his own son, Menoeceus, for his country's sake. Creon advises Menoeceus to flee, but with noble resolve Menoeceus stabs himself. When Polyneices and his allies attack the city, he meets Eteocles in one-to-one combat. Both are killed, and Jocasta commits suicide over their bodies. Creon then exiles both the self-blinded but living Oedipus and his daughter, Antigone.

Suppliant Maidens (Aeschylus, 490)

The Danaids, 50 daughters of Danaus, arrive with their father at Argos seeking escape from marriage to their 50 Egyptian cousins. In order to gain sanctuary they threaten to kill themselves and pollute Argive shrines. Danaus as spokesman prevails upon King Pelasgus to prepare to undertake a war against the Egyptians when they arrive.

Suppliant Women (Euripides 420–415)

Aethra, mother of Theseus, comes upon the mothers of the Seven Against Thebes who have come to Eleusis as suppliants. They, with Adrastus, king of Argos, beg Theseus to undertake a war so that they may recover and bury their dead husbands and sons. Although Theseus at first refuses, Aethra intervenes and Theseus becomes their champion. He engages in a vitriolic exchange with a messenger from Thebes, after which he sets out on an expedition against Thebes. A messenger returns to tell of Theseus' victory, and the victorious soon return with the bodies of the fallen Argives. During the Mothers' lament, Evadne, wife of Capaneus, one of the fallen Argives, leaps to a fiery death, causing her father to threaten to starve himself. His threat is interrupted by the arrival of the funeral cortege. Theseus, inclined to give the ashes to the Argives for burial in Argos, is interrupted by Athene who advises him to exact an oath that Argos will never attack Athens.

Women of Trachis (Sophocles, mid 5th c.)

Deianeira, the wife of Heracles, awaits his return and sends Hyllus, their son, to learn about his whereabouts because an oracle has indicated his return is imminent. Meanwhile Lichas, a messenger, arrives at Trachis with a group of captives, one of whom, Iole, invokes Deianeira's pity. When it becomes clear that Iole is Heracles' concubine, Deianeira sends him a robe smeared with what she believes is a love potion from the blood of the centaur Nessos. Upon discovering that the potion is burning poison and upon hearing Hyllus' description of Heracles' agony and Hyllus' curse, Deianeira retreats to her bedroom and stabs herself with Heracles' sword. Heracles returns, near death, and instructs Hyllus to burn him and marry Iole.

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INDEX LOCORUM

Aeschines
3. 212 — 19
3. 244 — 14, 18–9

Aeschylus
Agamemnon
570 — 24
874–6 — 176
Libation Bearers
591–2 — 88
Seven Against Thebes
719 — 80
Suppliant Maidens
5–10 — 83
14 — 83
112–6 — 82
118 — 84
128 — 84
142–3 — 83, 85
149–53 — 83, 85
154–60 — 82
260 — 84
329–31 — 83
365–80 — 82
394 — 83
398–9 — 82
452 — 82
457 — 82
459–79 — 16 n. 44, 82
483–8 — 82
524–42 — 83–4
625ff — 84
776–824 — 84–6, 102

Aristotle
Ath. Pol.
57.4 — 14
Nic.Eth.
1.1094a1–3 — 30
1.1094a27–b11 — 30
3.1115a26–7 — 30
3.1116a10–15 — 30–1
5.1130a3f — 30
5.1133b30ff — 30
5.1138a4–5ff — 30–1
8.1155a22–28 — 37
8.1159b25ff — 37
Poetics
1453b19 — 37
1454a32 — 154
Pol.
8.120 — 14

Artemidorus
On Dreams
1.4 — 20–21

Ctesias
29.48, 51, 52
FrGH IIIc688 — 24 n. 68

Demosthenes
23.76 — 14
43.57–8 — 14 n. 35
57.50 — 20

Dio Chrysostom
64.1–4 — 22

Euripides
Alcestis
20–1 — 164
31–5 — 162
49 — 162
65ff — 165
73–4 — 162
80–1 — 162
96–7 — 163
105 — 162
141 — 163
152–4 — 163
197–8 — 163
203 — 164
213ff — 80 n. 2
228–9 — 163
236 — 164
250 — 162
258 — 162
266–7 — 163, 165
273 — 162
283–8 — 164
293ff — 164
299–300 — 163
304ff — 164

320 1
336ff 162
357ff 165
380 162
382 163
386 162
391 162
396–7 163
414–5 163
416–9 163
455ff 165
616–7 162, 162 n. 90, 163
620 162
682 166
694–6 162
700–1 162
721 162
730 162
864 163
865 1
897ff 163
931–3 163

Andromache
176–8 98
766–801 96
807–65 96–7, 97 n. 39–40
866ff 98
877 98
902–3 98

Children of Heracles
400–4 145
420–1 145
434–42 145
450–3 145
471–2 145
476–7 145
500–1 145
507ff 146
510 145
513 145
520ff 146
522 145
530–4 145, 146
543–5 146
548–51 145, 146
555 146
557–8 146
561 146
566 146
579–96 147
605–22 147

Electra
681 24
686–8 177

Hecuba
222 158
351ff 158–9
370–1 158
373ff 131
378 129
414–8 160
432 158
444ff 160 n. 86
479–84 160
548 158
550–2 159
554ff 159
569–71 159
609–13 160–1
1056–1108 99–100
1107–8 1, 77

Helen
53ff 172
94 170
134–40 171
142 146, 171
198–9 171
249ff 172
255ff 171
262ff 172
270 171
279–98 171–2, 174
298 168
299–302 173–4, 173 n. 16, 174 n. 19
351–6 174
644–5 175
686–7 175
837 172, 174
841 172
842 173
845ff 175
927 172
953 173
982–90 173
1051 175
1091–2 175
1395–8 175
1478ff 80 n. 2
1686–7 175

Heracles
282–93 71–2
628 72
630 72

788–9 72
1127–8 73
1147–62 73–4
1191 73
1228–48 74
1257ff 75
1264ff 73
1295–1301 75
1309–10 76
1312 76
1319 77 n. 99
1340–6 77 n. 99
1347–51 76
1412–8 76–7

Hippolytus
45–6 69
78–80 67
84 67
176 164
275–7 164
373ff 69
375–87 67, 67 n.79, 68
392 71
393 69, 71
394 71
399 69
400 71
404 69
421–3 69
488–9 70
502–3 70
616–68 65
687–8 70
692 70
711–2 91
715–21 70
731 66, 67
732–75 80 n. 2, 90 n. 21–2, 90–1, 92 n. 26
790–807 91
826–9 91
857 91
1284–93 92
1299ff 67, 93
1326–30 93
1430 93

Ion
796ff 80 n. 2
1069–73 177
1238ff 80 n. 2

Iphigenia among the Taurians
972ff 176
1005–7 178

Iphigenia at Aulis
88–96 149
106 150
338ff 150
413ff 151
433–9 151
460–1 151
516–24 150
540 152
954–7 150
959ff 153
1080–2 153
1196–9 150
1218ff 153
1223ff 156
1258–87 154
1311–8 150, 154
1330–5 154
1375–6 131, 155
1394–9 150–1, 155, 156
1402–3 150
1439–41 151

Medea
1296ff 80 n. 2

Orestes
91 176
189 176
414–6 177
577ff 177
946ff 177
1163 146–7
1375 80 n. 2

Phaethon
Fr. 781.66ff 80 n. 2

Phoenician Women
378 127
381–2 126
618–9 126
690ff 140
774 140
784–832 141
834 140
884–5 142
911–4 140
947–8 140
952 140
962ff 141
997ff 139
1008–10 139
1019–66 141
1091–2 131, 139, 142
1205–7 140

1278 126
1282 126
1310–21 140, 144
1340ff 144
1389 128
1425 127
1427–32 126–7
1446 128
1457 126
1498–1518 127
1565 127
1567 128
1578 128
1582–3 127
1622–4 127
1641–2 127
1649 127
1651 127
1652 128
1659 128
1690–3 127
1696 127
1704–6 127
1726 127
1747–50 127
1763 128
Suppliant Women
232 124
496–9 124
639–60 124
829–30 80 n. 2
861–71 124
980–1 124
990 124
999 124
1002 124
1005–22 122–4
1024–5 121
1050–1 122
1054–7 122
1066 122
1072 122
1074–5 122
1105ff 176
Trojan Women
301–7 177
1012–4 177
1282 177

Harpocration
oxythymia 16

Herodotus
1.45 24
2.100 24
2.131 24
6.19 51 n. 18
7.107 24
7.108 25 n. 71
7.130 37
7.141 16 n. 44
7.220f 23–4
7.232 24
8.53 24

Inscriptions
Sokolowski *LSCG*
154B33–36 13–14

Isocrates
6.11 37
16.28 37

Lysias
12.18 17–8
12.45 17 n. 46
12.96 17–8

Ovid
Ibis
317 24 n. 68

Pausanias
4.9.2–10 152

Philostratus
Heroicus 21–22

Plato
Laws
9.861e–862c 27
9.869e 27
9.871d 28
9.873a–d 28
9.873b4–6 15 n. 40
9.896d 29
9.900e1–901e5 29
Phaedo
61b–e 26
63b–c 26
114d–115a 25–6
117b, e 165
Symposium
179c 37

Plutarch
Kleomenes
31 and 37 32 n. 94
Life of Themistocles
22.2 14–5, 17

Sophocles
Ajax
117 49 n. 13
131–2 49 n. 13
149–58 49 n. 13
384–595 48
396ff 47
458ff 47, 75
477–80 53, 59
589–90 47
614 48
646ff 48, 49 n. 13
650–3 46
758 49
667–8 46
677 46
679–81 47
691–2 49 n. 13
733–4 49
754–79 49, 49 n. 13
814ff 49 n. 13, 52
841 52
898 52
905–6 52, 131
915ff 14
1026–38 52–3
1067f 49
1234 49
1243 51
Antigone
1 132
32 133
72 132
73 134, 137
173–83 116
423 119 n. 55
460–70 132
524 134, 137
525 116
531 116
555 133
560 134
561–2 116
568 113
569 116
578–9 116
628 113
648–53 116
654 134, 137
720ff 113
734 116
736 117
750ff 136
751 113
756 117
760–1 136
762–7 113–4
810–6 134, 136–7
858ff 137
870 134, 137
883–4 136
887–8 137
905ff 164
927–8 119 n. 55
1055 117
1059 117
1105–6 117
1174–7 114, 117
1183–91 117–8
1204–5 134, 138
1207 134
1231–5 114
1240–1 134, 138
1242–3 115
1244 54 n. 31
1244–56 118–9, 118 n. 52–4
1276 119
1291 120
1294 119
1298–1300 120 n. 61
1301–5 119–20, 120 n. 57
1315 120
1344–6 120
Electra
1151–2 177
1320f 177
Oedipus at Colonus
962ff 104 n. 9
1081ff 80 n. 2
Oedipus the King
70–3 105
99 105
284–398 106–7
446 106, 106 n. 15
461–511 106–7
579–81 109
625 107
707–24 107
857–9 107
863–910 107–8, 107 n. 19
911–21 108
943–7 108–9
971–7 109
1056f 109
1060f 109
1071–5 54 n. 31, 109
1174 24

1182–8	110	968–70	60
1220ff	110	981	65
1234–5	110	1132	65
1242–50	104, 110–1	1149–50	61
1253	111	Fr. 476 (Radt)	80 n. 2
1255–63	111–2	Fr. 892 (Radt)	24
1367–8	112		
1445ff	111–2	Theocritus	
Philoctetes		23.36ff	14
999ff	176	23.52ff	14
1203ff	176		
Women of Trachis		Theognis	
39	62	306	37
65–6	56		
77	56	Thucydides	
291–2	56	3.81	24–5
319	58	5.5	37
322–8	59		
337ff	57	Timachidas of Lindos	
360	59	*FGrH* IIIb532D(2)	15–6
376	59		
441–6	61	Valerius Maximus	
515–6	61	9.2.6	24 n. 68
533	59		
545–51	62	Xenophon	
555	59	*Anab.*	
582–3	62	1.6.3	37
596–7	62	*Cyr.*	
721–2	59, 61	V.5.6.4	24 n. 70
726	62	*Cyr.*	
731	60	VI.1.37.5	24 n. 70
808–9	62	*Hell.*	
813–4	54 n. 31, 60, 62	II.3.56	18 n. 48
821–30	61	*Hell.*	
842–50	61	IV.8.39	24 n. 65
860–1	57, 61	*Hell.*	
871–95	62, 63, 63 n. 58	VI.4–7	25 n. 69
		Hier.	
896–7	57, 63	3.7	37
898	63		
900–31	63, 64	Zenobius	
947–59	88–9	6.17	23

GENERAL INDEX

The main discussions of suicide victims are listed below in italics.

Achilles 51, 117, 150, 152–6, 158, 172
Admetus 162–5
aeikes 10
Agamemnon 49, 54, 149–57, 158–9, 176
aidōs 4, 7, 8, 19, 45, 66–70, 78, 178
aischron 6, 10, 127
Ajax 5, 14, 21, 40, 41, 43, 45, *46–53*, 54, 71, 74–5, 77, 78–9, 98, 117, 120, 123, 130–1, 133, 138, 146–8, 164–5, 169–72, 175
Alcestis 1, 41, 65, 131–2, *161–5*, 166–7
Altruism 37–44, 79, 98, 113, 123, 129, 131, 141, 144, 147, 155, 166
Andromache 54, 93–9
Anger 31, 45, 52, 106, 113–5, 119, 123
Anomie 24, 37–44, 62, 70, 99
Antigone 5, 40, 43, 65, 98, *113–21*, 126–8, 129, *132–8*, 143, 152, 164–5, 166
aretē 4, 6, 7, 9, 45, 51, 63, 75, 79, 123, 125, 145, 154, 178
Aristotle 1, 12, 19, 23, 25, 29–31, 37, 75, 99, 115, 154, 178
atē 10
autosphagē 52
axenos 9

Boldness 62, 81, 125
Bride of Hades 85, 123, 125, 134–8, 151–2, 155, 159–61
Burial 17, 20–2, 27–9, 53, 81, 86, 111, 124, 126, 129, 132–3, 135–8, 147, 162

Calchas 149–56
Capaneus 121–2, 124–5
Capital crimes 27
Castor *169*
Chance 105, 109, 157
charis 7, 145
Clytemnestra 150–5, *176–7*
Coercion 81, 83, 85–7, 169, 173, 176, 178
Competition 6, 9, 45, 170
Compulsion 152, 154, 176
Courage 10, 12, 30, 53, 71, 75–6, 143–4, 159–60, 162, 173, 178
Cowardice 3, 12, 19, 28–30, 32, 46, 53, 71, 76, 99, 102, 112, 115, 139, 145–6
Cremation 21–2, 53
Creon 105–7, 112, 113–9, 127, 132–3, 136–7, 139–41, 143–4
Creusa *177*
Curses 60, 62, 65, 104, 108, 110, 119–20, 141, 163, 178

Danaids 40, 42, 82, 100
Death wish 80–1
Deception 47, 50, 56–65, 87, 103, 151–2, 169, 172, 175
Deianeira 42, 45, *53–65*, 77–8, *87–9*, 100, 103, 109, 115, 119–20, 164–5
Despair 24, 82, 85, 119, 126, 145, 175–9
dikē 2, 23, 36–7, 127, 132
Discretion 7, 69
Disgrace 2, 28, 45–6, 51, 64–5, 67, 71, 73, 75–6, 87, 99–100, 168, 171–2, 175
Dishonor 3, 13, 23, 70, 75, 172
Durkheim 13, 34–44
dyskleia 7, 10, 69, 73, 75

echthroi 6–7, 46, 128
Egoism 37–44
eikē 109
ekpneusai 131, 146–7
Electra *176–7*
Endurance 10, 46, 71, 75, 77–8, 100, 126, 128, 147, 163, 178
Equilibrium 5, 6, 13, 19, 42, 46, 71, 111, 140, 148
Erōs 61, 71, 172
Eroticism 122–3, 138, 151–2, 159
Escape wish 33, 71, 73–4, 80–1, 83–100, 141, 175

Ethical considerations 1–12, 23, 32–3, 62, 67–8, 72, 75, 100–1, 118, 126–8, 165, 168, 175, 178–9
eugeneia 45, 178
eukleia 4, 7, 10, 66–7, 69–70, 78, 178
Eurydice 40–1, 43, 102, 109, 113, *115–20*, 134–5, 138
Evadne 40–41, 102, *121–5*, 140, 174, 177

Fairness 10, 45
Family 1, 113, 115, 117, 119–21, 128, 132–4, 140, 144
Fatalism 37, 42–3, 131, 147, 159
Forgiveness 78
Freedom 7, 85–7, 100–1, 149–50, 154, 156, 158–60
Friendship 6, 71, 74, 76, 78, 165

Generosity 53
Glory 121–5, 129, 144, 151, 155
Good sense 69–71, 113
Grief 1, 33, 102, 109, 113–5, 118, 120, 125, 127–8, 144, 147, 165, 175, 178–9
Guest-Hosts 7, 52, 73
Guilt 3, 54, 66, 106, 126, 143, 146, 164, 169, 171, 178

Haemon 43, 102, *113–9*, 120, 136–8, 152
Harm enemies, help friends 6, 65, 67, 72–3, 127–8, 145
Hecuba 42, 54, 77, 99–100, 157–61, 166–7, 172, 177
Helen 2, 147, 155, *168–76*, 177
Hemlock 18, 165
Heracles 40–1, 43, 45, 55–64, *71–8*, 88–9, 98, 111, 145–6, 163, 165
Hermione 43, *93–9*
Heroic values 5–6, 23, 46–8, 52, 59, 71–2, 75–6, 95, 154–6, 165, 170, 175–6
Hippolytus 89–93
Homer 1, 3, 21, 78, 127, 178
Honor 3, 12–3, 23, 25, 32, 45, 52, 70, 76, 144, 154, 168–9, 173
Hospitality 162
Human sacrifice 143–4, 148, 156
hybris 9, 63

Impiety 28, 103
Improper behavior 5, 9–11
Institutional suicide 3, 17, 28, 139
Integration 24, 37, 52, 105, 119, 123, 133, 138
Intellect 65–6, 68, 92
Iolaus 145–8
Iphigenia 41, 43, 129–32, *149–57*, 159, 166, 177
Iphis 122–3, *176*
Irony 51, 53, 56, 62, 76, 81, 108, 110, 112, 134, 142–3, 156, 168, 170–1, 177
Ismene 116, 132–3
Isolation 32, 46–9, 51, 53, 55, 71, 74–5, 98, 123, 133

Jocasta (Euripides) 102, *126–8*, 140, 142, 144
Jocasta (Sophocles) 40, 41, 43, 51, *103–13*, 120, 177

kaka 74, 100, 102–3, 109–10, 115, 126–8
kakon 6, 9–10, 175
kalon 6

Laziness 3, 28–30
Leaping 22, 73, 86, 97, 100, 122–3, 176–7
Leda *169*, *171*, *173*, *175*
Lying 58, 91
Loyalty 10, 45, 59, 106, 147, 165

Macaria 41, 43, 129–32, 140, *144–8*, 153–4, 159, 166
Madness 72–3
malakia 10, 30
mania 10, 46, 116, 152
Marriage 42, 62, 64, 70, 81–3, 104, 110, 113, 122, 124, 127, 133–8, 145, 151–6, 159–61, 164
Martyrdom 40–1, 129, 132, 138, 161, 166
mega phronein 9
Megara 71, 75–7
Menelaus 4, 9, 95, 150, 157, 171–4, 177
Menoeceus 41, 123, 126, 129–32, *139–44*, 159, 165–6
Miasma 11, 74, 82, 105, 112
Misogyny 116–20
Moderation 66–7, 78
Moral relativity 70, 76, 79, 94, 97–8
Murder 14, 18, 27–8, 72, 74, 114, 143, 150, 155, 161–2, 164

Neoptolemus 94–8, 159
neosphagēs 52
Niobe 137
Nobility 4, 54, 58–9, 65, 71, 145, 150–1, 158–60, 166–7, 170, 172
Noble ideals 19, 24, 32, 53, 94, 129
nomos 67, 78

Odysseus 21, 48, 149–50, 157, 176
Oedipus 51, 104–12, 126–8, 141, 144, 177
oikos 7, 10, 62, 69, 113, 115, 118–9
Oracles 51, 56, 58–61, 64, 105–9, 124, 139–43, 145–8, 149–57
Orestes 95, 98, 146–7, *176–7*

Passion 65–6, 68, 91
pathos 122, 125, 136, 147
Patriotism 131, 140, 143–4, 148, 166
Peleus 95
Persephone 123, 145
Phaedra 40, 42, 45, *65–71*, 77–8, *89–93*, 98, 100, 123, 164–5
pharmakos 143, 159
Pheres 162–3, 166
philia 4, 7, 13, 23, 36–7, 79, 104, 133, 157, 178
philoi 6–7, 46–8, 128
Philoctetes 176
phoneus 52
phthonos 9
physis 67, 78, 102
Piety 107, 126, 165
Pity 25, 46, 53, 57, 63, 65, 74, 82, 87, 100, 111, 162
Plato 3, 12, 15, 17, 19, 25–9, 31, 75, 99, 165
polis 7, 10, 115–7, 132–3, 138
Pollution 11, 13–4, 16, 74, 82, 102, 120, 134, 142, 146, 173, 178
Polydeuces *169*
Polyxena 41, 43, 131–2, 155, *158–61*, 166
Proper behavior 5–11
Prophecy 49, 106–9, 138–9, 163
Punishment of suicide corpse 11, 17, 18–20, 22–3, 28–9, 31
Purification 13–4, 17, 29

Regeneration 137–8
Regulation 37, 62, 64, 103, 162
Reintegration 46, 102–3, 105, 115, 126
Reputation 1–2, 7, 10, 54, 59, 65–6, 69, 71, 78, 93, 97–8, 100, 128, 146, 166, 169, 171–3, 178
Revenge 24, 51, 66–7, 74, 157–8

Sacrifice 46, 70, 120, 142–4, 146, 149–50, 152–4, 158–61, 174
Scapegoat 159
Secrecy 55–64, 70
Self-sacrifice 1, 3, 23–4, 32, 40–1, 99, 126, 129–67, 168, 174, 177
Self-worth 53, 138
Separation 58, 70, 102, 152, 162
Sexuality 67, 137
Shame culture 96
Shame 3, 10, 12, 23–4, 32–3, 45–6, 52, 55, 62, 64–6, 70, 72–4, 78, 92, 98, 114, 159, 170, 172, 178
Silence 54–65, 69–71, 78, 87, 91, 93, 97–8, 100, 103, 109, 118–9, 140, 145, 164
Silent exit 54–5, 60–1, 103, 109–10, 115, 118
Skepticism 102, 108–12
Sociological theory 11, 13, 24, 29, 31–44, 48, 52, 55, 60, 64, 67, 70, 85, 92, 98, 100–2, 123, 131–3, 139–40, 158
Socrates 25–6, 165
sophronein 46
sōphrosynō 7, 9, 66–7, 127
sphageus 52, 120
sphaxas 139
sphazō 131
Suicide See Index Locorum
Suicide attempt 81, 94, 96–9
Suicide note 65–6, 70, 80, 87–9, 91–3, 98–100
Suicide threat 81–7, 113, 136
Suicide by burning 73, 97
Suicide by hanging 14–5, 20, 24, 82, 84, 86, 92, 96, 111, 132, 137–8, 163, 171, 173–4, 176–7
Suicide by stabbing 31, 63, 73, 86, 96, 111, 114–5, 119–20, 126–8, 131, 139, 142, 163, 172–4, 176–7
Suicide by starvation 65, 122, 176–7
Suppliant Maidens 43, *81–7*, 88, 100, 176
Suppliant Women *121–5*
Suttee 40, 121, 123, 174
syngnōmē 78

Teiresias 105–6, 117–8, 135, 139–41
Temperance 66

Teucer 21, 147, 169–72
Theseus 71, 73–4, 79, 89, 91, 122, 124
Threats 74, 176
timē 6, 45
tlemosynē 4, 10, 75, 77, 79
to prepon 10
tolmē 10

Vengeance 1, 45–6, 65, 76, 99, 178
Voluntary death 26, 32, 71, 129–67

xenia 7, 10, 82, 132, 145, 162, 165–6
xenos 100

Zeus 8, 82–4, 86–7, 124, 132

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